



Film Tourism for Heritage Conservation and Promotion: The Case of Nrityagram, the First Indian Dance Village

Priyakrushna Mohanty*, Anila Thomas†, Harshitha Pudota‡, Meghna Deka§

Abstract

Film tourism has been recognized as a key instrument in the process of destination development and co-creation of tourist experiences. The promotion of any destination through films can result in attracting more visitors and subsequently, formulation of policies favoring that destination which aid in the conservation and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the place. In this context, this article analyses the case of Nrityagram, a village formed by the international community of Indian classical dancers. The work highlights the possibility that if promoted as a film tourism destination, Nrityagram can contribute to the promotion and conservation of Indian cultural dance, a form of intangible heritage. The work is primarily qualitative in nature and draws upon existing

* Assistant Professor, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru, India; pkmohanty90@gmail.com

† Assistant Professor and Head, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru, India; toms.anila@gmail.com

‡ Undergraduate Student, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru, India; arshichoudarypudota@gmail.com

§ Undergraduate Student, Department of Tourism and Travel Management, Jyoti Nivas College, Bengaluru, India; meghnadeka99@gmail.com

literature as well as the experiences gained from the field visit made to the said site.

Keywords: Film Tourism, Heritage Conservation, Destination Promotion, Dance, Nrityagram

1. Introduction

Film tourism has become a growing 'trend' thanks to the massive reach and influence movies have on people (Bolan & Williams, 2008). The mass production of movies combined with the ease of travel has catapulted the growth of this niche segment of travel in the last two decades (Martin-Jones, 2014). Often termed as cinema tourism or movie tourism, the concept of film tourism is defined as "*visitation to sites where movies and television programmes and series have been filmed as well as tours to production studios, including film-related theme parks*" (Beeton, 2016). Despite its recent emergence, this industry creates multiple opportunities for travel entrepreneurs and local communities. Citing the work of Belhassen et al. (2008), Anne Buchmann (2010: 233) offers a rather simple definition of film tourism as "*the visitation of a site or a location that is or has been used for or is associated with filming*" (Buchmann, Moore, & Fisher, 2010).

In addition to its staggering growth, film tourism has been recognized as a key instrument in destination development (Kim, Kim, & King, 2019) and the co-creation of tourist experiences (Sigala, 2016). Films inspire people to travel and explore new destinations, celebrate new events, meet new people and experience a new culture. The promotion of any destination through films can result in attracting visitors and subsequently, formulation of favorable policies for that destination which aids in the conservation and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the place (Martin-Jones, 2014). Therefore, there is a strong linkage between film tourism and heritage conservation along with promotion (Ghisoiu, Bolan, Gilmore, & Carruthers, 2017). This linkage can be very well used for conserving and promoting heritage that requires impetus for their growth.

In this context, the authors have focused on the issue of Indian classical dance forms losing their charm and subsequently, have argued that film tourism can be one of the most efficient ways of conserving and promoting these art forms which are a form of intangible heritage. While advocating their views, the authors have cited the case of Nrityagram, India's first dancing village, and highlighted the potential of the Indian film industry (Bollywood in particular) for promoting and conserving the Indian cultural dance heritage through the development of Nrityagram as a film tourism destination.

Academic deliberations about film tourism have dealt with several issues like destination promotion, image building, place identity, and destination marketing, etc. However, barring a few works, majority of them haven't shed much light on heritage conservation (Ghisoiu et al., 2017). Further, despite being one of the biggest film industries, there is a dearth of academic works about the Indian movie industries and its connection with heritage. Keeping this in mind, the article deals with three objectives. The first of which is to highlight the potential of film tourism as a medium for heritage conservation and promotion. The second objective talks about film tourism with respect to its potentials in India and highlights some of its current engagement as an agent for heritage promotion. Lastly, the article draws upon a theoretical framework for developing Nrityagram as a film tourism destination and its predicted impact on the Indian classical dance heritage.

2. Methodology Used

This work can be classified as exploratory in nature as it ventures into issues like the Indian film tourism industry's contribution to heritage conservation that hasn't been discussed before. The majority of the work is qualitative in nature. Both primary and secondary data have been collected for this article. While the secondary data draws upon existing literature, primary data are based on the experiences gained from the observations of the authors during their field visit to the Nrityagram. Another

significant factor of this article is the use of *grey literature* which is defined as the “*literature that includes unpublished studies and studies published outside widely available journals*” (Conn et al., 2003). As the work is exploratory research, data for the study was not adequately present in the academic literature and hence, authors have used the grey literature that is also a rich source of information (Sulouff, Bell, Briden, Frontz, & Marshall, 2005).

2.1 Film Tourism and Heritage Conservation: The Interlinkages

The potential effects of films are that they generate a new and special form of tourism which is referred to as “film tourism” or “film-induced tourism” or “movie-induced tourism” (Connell, 2012; Hao & Ryan, 2013) and it is a part of the broader theme of cultural tourism. Accordingly, Horner and Swarbrooke (2012) state that cultural tourism entails of various underlying elements that include a) traveling to historic destinations and attractions, along with presence at authentic festivals, b) journey inspired by a wish for tasting local, regional, and national food and beverage, c) watching of customary sports events while participating in the local holiday activities, and d) visits to factories, farms, artisan-led workshops and more. Film tourism being a part of cultural tourism ensures the fulfillment of all the above mentioned criteria only with the specific note that these visits be induced by films or movies.

The first mention of “film-induced tourism” was in the works of Beeton (2005) [cited the reprint version of 2016] in her book with the same title in which she suggested this concept in place of “movie-induced tourism” to broaden the scope to embrace films, documentaries and mini-series (Pennacchia, 2015). The feelings and emotions linked with these novel types of tourism affect the visits made to the film sets of such movies and shooting sites. May it be full-fledged feature films or television programs or series, there are references to theme parks, cultural heritage sites, famous film studios, and celebrities for destination promotion which connect the audio-visual domain with tourists and their visits. The attribute of film tourism also appears in France entitled “cinétourisme”. In some cases, the locations share a great connection with superstars

such as James Dean, Farrah Fawcett, Marilyn Monroe, George Reeves among others who have passed away while their legacy stands intact (Lee, Scott, & Kim, 2008). So, in its most basic form, film-induced tourism occur whenever a tourist or a group of tourists choose to travel to a destination after being inspired by the broadcasted audio-visual images.

Promotions associated with films attests to be a brilliant tool for nurturing mindfulness in the observances of tourists as they promote the real values of the tourism destination and aids in the creation of a favorable destination image (Croy, 2010). Their specific advantages in comparison to the other unconventional means of communication are that they influence the visual images and the emotions before the tourist arrives at the place (Mathisen & Prebensen, 2013). Another interesting aspect of film tourism is that they can have long-lasting effects on the tourist's mind in a way that a movie can strive to attract visitor years after its release. In their study Riley and Van Doren (1992) concluded that even though the height of interest arises after a movie is released, a 54% surge in visitation was found at least after 5 years in the 12 movies they studied and images are frequently recalled for a considerably longer period of time. These lasting effects can possibly elucidate the success of some places that have revitalized attractions to create film influences more evident and enhanced tourism despite the film's release date (Grihault 2003).

Also, it is not sufficient to promote only the current attributes. There is also a necessity to progress through new tourist destinations and experiences founded on the grounds of cultural heritage, such as music and film festivals, street performances showcasing historical themes, music concerts and cultural events. Film tourism, despite being a comparatively new form of tourism has been applauded for its ability to aid in potential destination development (Heitmann, 2010) and in the co-creation of new tourist experiences (Ghisoiu et al., 2017).

Both the tourism and film communities have also recognized the productive benefits and rewards of 'Cinema Tourism' which has

cemented the path for a long, strong, and mutually symbiotic relationship between them. Representation in big-banner movies can promote a destination in a way that most DMOs (Destination Marketing Organisations) cannot promote, nor afford to pay for (Bolan & Davidson, 2005). Research works have revealed that a movie can have a superlative influence on travel decisions and destination image and thereby makes a significant input to the area of tourism marketing and particularly cinematic tourism (Hudson, Wang, & Gil, 2011).

It's been observed that the huge developments in the field of movie-making has affected and deeply influenced the human. Connecting the masses through films and conveying moral messages is a very conducive way to create awareness especially in countries like India as the spectators gets involved and follows the dialogue, style, and messages conveyed through cinemas. Unlike traditional promotional activities, film tourism can help in the exchange and transfer of messages and ideas from one generation to the other. Generally, cinemas tend to stimulate audiences indirectly as a contextual part of the film's message (Hudson et al., 2011). Several articles have previously stated that movies are a more prospective way to reach bigger audiences with a smaller amount of investment than precisely targeted tourism ads and promotion (Dore & Crouch, 2003). Therefore, Cynthia and Beeton (2009, p. 118) mention, "*Film-induced tourism is a powerful tourism marketing and promotional tool [...]*" and can deliver both short and long term advertising for a place (Rewtrakunphaiboon, 2009). Thus, in the last decade, films and television have been critical factors in persuading tourist decisions to pursue a travel to the attractions that are captured as shooting locations; Something that outmoded advertising is incapable of doing (Beeton, 2006).

Many heritage destinations that function as cinema locations accrue reputation following the film's release because these destinations gain specific meaning through the narration of films. Without movie storylines, any common touristic attraction may not be differentiated from others (Busby & Klug, 2001). Film tourism is possibly the best way to promote heritage destinations in the

country. It is observed that tourists visit destinations owing to their historical importance that has been projected on screen through movies. Films are only one of the numerous artistic productions and the portrayal of world heritage sites along with other heritage sites as places enhances an extra element to the destination. So, cinema-induced tourism is emerging as progressively relevant and it is imperative to evaluate its impacts on heritage sites and World Heritage Sites used as shooting locations. The integration of the different elements of heritage and the filmshoots at a site including its attractions and the communication between all the various stakeholders are also important aspects.

Additionally, the filmmakers can be inspired by folklore and can make movies and documentaries from them. These films can improve the knowledge of the places and make the tourists aware of the amusing heritage and the culture of the destinations. This not only popularizes the unexplored destinations but also helps in conserving the places and their rich history. Lastly, the surge of the cultural attributes of a movie location can be used to infer that films are a potential medium for communicating with several cultural values and meanings. Numerous heritage destinations that serve as cinema locations attain popularity as these attractions gain particular connotations through film narration.

2.2 Indian Films and Heritage: Exploring the Connection

Film tourism is denoted as the tourism that is resultant of the showcasing of an attraction or destination in the film, video, or television. Loosely falling under the canopy of cultural tourism, film tourism is a rising sensation worldwide, powered by both the growth in international travel and the progress of the entertainment sector. The advantages of film tourism are gradually becoming evident.

In this backdrop, the Indian film industry demands to be discussed when one talks about films as they have influenced the Indian culture and the lives of Indians like no other. The country produces thousands of movies in a wide range of languages annually portraying the enthralling destinations of India. These films not

only entertain the audience but their role has been enlarged drastically over time. The Indian movies have turned out as instruments in influencing tourist decision making and encouraging them to explore new destinations and increasing the tourist traffic in already known destinations. They have a large impact on the audience than anyone can imagine. In a country where films serve more than just a purpose of entertainment, film tourism can benefit not only the industry but also holds the power to create an impact in the Indian economy if approached responsibly and applied correctly.

Indian Film Industry, notably, Bollywood is considered one of the largest film industries across the globe (Shresthova, 2011). Considering the number of films produced, box office collection, and employment generation, Bollywood has a higher position than Hollywood. The Indian cinematic business is also one of the rapidly progressing sectors in the nation today and has grown from INR 112 billion in 2012 to INR183 billion in 2020, representing a staggering growth rate of around 50% (Statista, 2020). In the last two decade, the industry's revenues have increased considerably and the estimated size of the industry is projected to mark 196% growth by 2022 (Statista, 2020). The Indian film industry is also one of the biggest producers of cinematographic movies in the globe with a yearly certification in excess of 2400 films during FY19-20.

India, as one of the foremost cinema-producing nations with the movie community spread across several regions of the nation, also highlights a host of locations and landscape across these regions in various States / Union Territories, making those destinations attractive places for the creation of both domestic and international films. Indian movie industry has been able to stimulate tourism in India both directly and indirectly. The media & entertainment sector has thus impacted different practices of tourism and has expanded awareness to Indian language, landscape, religion, dance, music, cuisine, and festivals. Film tourism denotes the effects that cinema can have on decisions regarding travel as they motivate people to experience the the movie locations first hand. Film tourism is not only an outstanding method for marketing of

destination , but it also exhibits novel product creation opportunities, such as film museums, exhibitions, location tours, and the theming of current tourist destinations with a film association.

Films are highly valued in India and it creates a desire in the audience to visit the awe-inspiring locations and the resplendent destinations depicted in the films. If a viewer gets induced and has an urge to visit that particular location after knowing it from a film, film tourism becomes the pull factor for the travel. In the background of film tourism, both the entertainment industry and the travel industry are interconnected and are mutually benefitted.

2.3 Bollywood and Heritage: A Marriage Made in Heaven

There are more than a thousand Indian movies that present a quaint picture of Indian history and heritage. They are known to create awareness about the destination which is followed by a surge in tourist inflow to the destination.

Das (2019) in his post on India Travel and Tourism Blog, magnificently portrays the Bollywood's linkage with Indian tourism destinations and more specifically Indian heritage destinations. Among all these examples, the use of Sheesh Mahal in Jaipur as the set for the iconic movie *Mughal-E-Azam* and Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi in Gujarat depicted as the house of Aishwarya Rai in the movie *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* is one to remember. The super-hit movie also had different other scenes that clutched the attention of travellers like the Bada Bagh, Jaisalmer - where Salman Khan and Aishwarya Rai dream of their marriage and Orchard Palace, Gondal in Gujarat - where Aishwarya Rai is dragged by Ajay Devgn

The cities that include the Golden Triangle - Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur has become the second home for Indian cinema. Rockstar, Delhi Belly, Rang De Basanti, Delhi 6, Vicky Donor, Khosla Ka Ghosla, Yeh Saali Zindagi, Band Baja Barat, Love Sex Aur Dhoka, and No One Killed Jessica are some of the renowned Bollywood movies that have been filmed in different major heritage sites of

Delhi. Of them, the Red Fort, India Gate, Qutub Minar, Jama Masjid, and Humayun's Tomb were the key spots. The Song 'Bol Na Halke Halke' from the film *Jhoom Barabar Jhoom* was stunningly pictured in the main heritage sites of Delhi along with the Taj Mahal. Again, the song 'Dhunki' from the film *Mere Brother Ki Dulhan* is filmed against the astounding background of the Taj Mahal and Agra Fort. In Subhash Ghai's *Pardes*, Fatehpur Sikri, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, was casted as the backdrop for a number of scenes, especially for the iconic song 'Do Dil'. The film network is in love with Jaipur too, another UNESCO heritage. The song 'Bholi Bhali Ladki' from the movie *Sabse Bada Khiladi* was completely shot in Birla Mandir in Jaipur whereas an important part of the movie *Umrao Jaan* was filmed in Jaipur's City Palace. In 2009, the movie *Veer* featuring Salman Khan was filmed at the Amber Fort; and *What's Your Raashee?* By Ashutosh Gowariker was shot at Shiv Vilas in Jaipur (Das, 2019).

The Lake Palace, Udaipur, now one of the premium luxury hotels in India, also made its path into Indian movie industry. Films like *Yeh Jawani Hai Deewani* and *Yaadein* were shot here. Another heritage city Udaipur was also shot in other Bollywood films like *Guide*, *Gaddaar*, *Ram Leela*, *Khuda Gawah*, *Hum Hain Rahi Pyar Ke*, and more. Victoria Terminus and The Gateway of India in Mumbai became the two chief filming spots of Indian cinema whenever the moviemakers ponder upon a shooting site in Mumbai. Likewise, the Victoria Memorial Hall of Kolkata is a landmark destination for regional and Bollywood filmmakers (Das, 2019).

Countless people have booked a trip to Chapora fort in Goa after watching *Dil Chahta Hai* whereas *Hum Hai Rahi Pyaar Ke* has promoted the massive Buland Darwaja in Fatehpur Sikri. Also the Shammi Kapoor and Sadhana starred movie *Rajkumar* depicted the well elaborate architecture of the temples of Mahabalipuram. This underlines the strong bond Bollywood shares with the prominent heritage sites. Not to mention the fact that apart from Bollywood there are several other box offices with huge gross collections which promote the values of Indian heritage. Thus Indian movie industry has played a significant role in promoting Indian

landscape, heritage, and culture among travellers who are seeking to explore varied Indian tourism destinations.

2.4. The Dilemma of Indian Classical Dance Forms

Indian cultural dance forms are considered to be some of the majestic and well-defined art forms with a global presence. Ever since the beginning of major Indian film industries, classical dance forms have been revered deeply in iconic movies and documentaries. May it be the famous *Taal* movie or *Mughal-E-Azam*, the depiction of the Indian classical dance forms has been one of the highlights of these masterpieces. Unlike their western counterpart Hollywood, Bollywood movies are known for the usage of dance in the middle of the movies. Apart from the movies, there are also music albums that showcase the beautiful art of dance.

However, a recent article by (Chandran & Davar, 2019, Apr 29) highlights the issue of Indian classical dance forms losing their charm with the advent of western dance forms like Street Jazz, Salsa, and hip-hop. Because of the 'ease' and 'glamour' associated with the contemporary western dance forms, the Indian youth is slowly yet steadily moving towards the non-Indian dance forms. Take for example the successful movie, *ABCD* (Any Body Can Dance) which is entirely based on different dance forms. The movie primarily showcases non-Indian dance forms. This issue is partly attributed to the changing taste of the youth which is ignited by the major advertising of these art forms and Bollywood's obsession with the western dance forms. Also, the common belief that anything 'western' is 'classy' or 'trendy' adds to the bias. Indian cultural dance forms are not just any heritage, but elements that have shouldered the responsibility of transferring the great Indian legacy since time immemorial.

Additionally, Indian classical dance forms are regarded as one of the toughest dance forms to practice. Today's generation Z is full of energy, but at the same time lacks patience and commitment (Gaidhani, Arora, & Sharma, 2019). This is why a majority of the youth lose their interest in the middle of their practice sessions and

abandon it halfway through. The requirements in terms of performance period are also considerably taxing. Any commercial movie devotes a maximum of 5-6 minutes to a dance performance. Many of the classical dance Gurus consider this a drawback as classical dance forms require a considerable amount of stage time. However, this issue can be resolved by showcasing only a part of the dance form which has that aesthetic value or any other 'USP'.

There is also the aspect of sexuality and the attire used in the different dance forms. While some of the popular western dance forms are believed to have a more free-flowing flashy attire that can expose some of the body parts attached with sexuality, Indian classical dance forms follow a subtle dressing pattern that resists any skin show. In this modern world, nudity in the item songs has become a common phenomenon in Bollywood (Jain, Roy, Garud, & Mazid, 2019). This is one of the reasons why trained Indian classical dances show disinterest in Bollywood. However, with time the industry and the audience are becoming accommodative and inclusive. This gives hope for the future and the possibilities are endless.

3. The Case: Nrityagram, the First Dance Village in India

Designed by the celebrated Indian architect Gerard Da Gunta, Nrityagram is the first Indian modern gurukul (residential school) for Indian classical dance forms with the village formed by the international community of Indian classical dancers. It is situated in Hesaraghatta which is 30 Kms away from Bangalore in the Indian state of Karnataka. This dance village is built by taking inspiration from the vernacular architecture of the area and was set up by late Odissi dancer Protima Bedi whose dream was to revive the old gurukul system of dance in India. The word Nrityagarm means "dance village" and it attracts a lot of visitors due to its serene and eco-friendly environment. In the words of its founder Protima Gauri

“It (Nrityagram) is a community of dancers in a forsaken place amidst nature. A place where nothing exists, except

dance. Places where you breathe, eat, sleep, dream, talk, imagine – dance. A place where all the five senses can be refined to perfection. A place where dancers drop negative qualities such as jealousy, small-mindedness, greed and malice to embrace their colleagues as sisters and support each other in their journey towards becoming dancers of merit.”

In the year 1989, founder Protima Gauri left the city of Mumbai to pursue her dream to build a dance school, and the following year in 1990 she was given a 10 acre land on lease by the Karnataka government. Protima had this land turned into a village where Indian classical dancers from all parts of the world can thrive and flourish. The Residential School has been playing a crucial role in promoting the country’s various classical dance forms all around the globe in a self-sufficient and holistic habitat. Following the ancient Guru-disciple tradition, Nrityagram offers training in Odissi, Manipuri, Kathak, Mohiniattam, Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi, and Kathakali. Nrityagram has some of the finest classical dancers of the Odissi like Bijayini Satpathy, Surupa Sen, Pavitra Reddy, and four other ace dancers like Akshati, Kavita, Dhruva, and Prithvi belonging to other dance forms.

Nrityagram made its international debut under the leadership of Protima Gauri in New York in 1996 and their performance was termed as *“one of the most luminous dance events of the year”*. Their performance helped them mark a permanent niche in the world of dance and after that, there was no turning back. The ensemble performed all around the world in places like USA, Hawaii, Middle East, Bozeman, Europe and the Far East. In 2008, the group made the world premiere of *“Pratima: Reflection”* at New York City which was spellbinding.

Vasanthahabba, a night-long festival of arts organized by Nrityagram is regarded as the traditional Woodstock of India and is celebrated first Saturday of February every year. Nrityagram has a temple dedicated to Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra, founder Protima Gauri’s dance teacher. Hesaraghatta Lake is another

destination near Nrityaram that is unexplored. It is a man-made freshwater lake, and the place is a paradise for all the nature-lovers and stargazers. The tourists can enjoy a boat ride and visit the destination for a picnic and spend some quality time with their loved ones.

Protima Bedi set out on her pilgrimage in August 1998 to Kailash Mansarovar and died in the Maple Landslide in a village near the India-Nepal border. Before her death, Protima handed over Lynne Fernandes (now the managing trustee) the reign of Nrityagram Trust while making Surya in-charge of training and art. There were many debates on the future of Nrityagram but it remains true as Protima had hoped for. Her dream to establish an institution and a place ideal for dancers has now become an integral part of Bangalore's cultural heritage.

4. Nrityagram for Heritage Conservation: The Implications

As a heritage tourism destination, Nrityagram highlights a host of tourism resources that can provide it a firm foundation to become a film tourism destination. The use of nature in the construction of Nrityagram brings people closer to its environment and culture. Indian dance practice plays a vital role in Hindu culture as it has been a medium of prayer going back thousands of years.. Much of the Indian culture and art including Indian dance forms are exotic. The main principle of Indian classical dance is lovers and their love for the lord. Nrityagram's main aim is to preserve the art and culture of Indian society and spread Indian culture through the use of dance. The director of Nrityagram, Surupan Sen says that "*her dance involves the meticulous readings of metrological texts, deep observation of sculptures, and it cannot be literal but the complex one.*".



Fig 1: Location of Nriyagram

Source: <https://www.google.com/earth/Nriyagram>

Nriyagram is efficiently working towards the preservation and dissemination of art. It had put in the effort to establish gurukul, a platform to impart skills of dancing and developing existing arts. The residential school had many mud houses, a beautiful temple depicting the image of Kelucharan Mohapatra, a yoga center, and several guest cottages for visitors. Nriyagram receives thousands of tourists from all over the world to visit different gurukuls like Odissi, Mohiniattam, and Kathak functioning on ancient gurukul systems in a shared environment. The institution justifies the role of the teacher as a protector and a person of knowledge. The students in Nriyagram learn subjects like Indian literature, mythology, poetry, Sanskrit, music, aesthetics, and various other subjects.

These tourism resources coupled with the proximity to the Government Film and Television institute along with the natural beauty of Hesaraghatta Lake provide Nriyagram strategic advantages to become a film tourism destination. The diversity of the tourism resources consist not just of cultural but also natural

and social embodiments. Further, Indian classical dance forms which are losing their charm with the advent of western hip-hop, freestyle dance forms, and other issues discussed in the earlier section will get a boost by promoting Nrityagram as a film tourism destination. Lastly, dance being one of the intrinsic parts of the movie industry will promote and supplement the development of the film industry as well. Therefore, a huge amount of untapped opportunities lie ahead of Nrityagram when it comes to heritage promotion and film tourism development.

5. Conclusion

There exists a strong symbiosis between film tourism and heritage. While film tourism can contribute positively towards building favorable destination image, co-creation of tourism experiences, and new destination development, heritage sites have also been used heavily as film shooting sites. This symbiotic relationship can be further utilized to conserve heritage sites through the economic benefits from film tourism and favorable policies. In this study, the case of Nrityagram, the first dance village situated in Karnataka has been highlighted. By showcasing the tourism potentials of Nrityagram, it has been argued that if promoted as a film tourism destination, Nrityagram can assist in the conservation and promotion of Indian cultural dance heritage that requires revival.

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