

Restoration as a Social Process Sacred Sites that cut across Religious Boundaries

The secular cultural traditions of Punjab are nowhere more exemplified than in the life and times of the three religious sites chosen by CRCI for its Project. Located in different settlements of the Gurdaspur district, these sites are inhabited by Hindus, Christians and the Sikhs who are the largest community. The temple in Kishankot is today being looked after by the Sikh community; the mosque on the River Beas, is being maintained by the Nihangs - a sect of the Sikhs; and the Dargah of a Muslim Saint is being cared for by the Christian and other communities of the neighborhood.

These sacred places stand silent testimony to the harmonious relationship between man and different religions in modern times. They symbolize the peaceful co-existence of different ways of looking at the world, in a land carelessly ravaged by partition and terrorism in the not so distant past.



Kishankot Temple

Located in the village of Kishankot, this temple was built during the reign of the legendary Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The wall paintings within depict a harmonious blend of a range of themes concerned with Hindu gods and goddesses, the fabled poet Kabir, the 10th Sikh Gurus and court scenes from Ranjit Singh's court. As mentioned earlier, the temple is being looked after by the Sikh community living around it.



Guru Ki Masjid

This 17th century mosque, on the banks of the river Beas, was built by the 6th Sikh Guru Hargobind for his Muslim subjects. Legend has it that the Hindu God Vishwakarma came down to earth in a human form to build this sacred town of Sri Hargobindpur. For many years, this mosque has been maintained by the Nihangs.



Dargah of Baba Shah Bidar Dewan

Said to have been constructed in the early 19th century in the village of Massania, this sacred Dargah is visited by devotees every Thursday. When the Muslims of the village left India at the time of partition, they handed over the responsibility of 'lighting the lamp' to a Christian family living in the area. Even today it is cared for by the Christian and other communities inhabiting the village. A large festival is celebrated here, every summer.

The restoration of these historic sites has two interrelated dimensions – the material and the symbolic. It is of little meaning to restore the physical structure of the building without recovering its cultural heritage. Restoration is thus a social process which is concerned simultaneously with the recovery of the physical-material structure and with the preservation and conservation of the social and cultural values of life, that generate the sense of community, and lie embedded in the monument and in the collective unconscious.

Restoration becomes meaningful only when it can be translated into a continuing pattern of livelihood.

Project Scope

1. Identification and documentation of cultural sites in 2 districts of Punjab (work in 7 other districts has already been completed).
2. The recovery of the material and symbolic aspects of the cultural heritage at the selected sites as integral to the process of sustainable development.
3. Dialogue and interaction with people to identify their skills, and understand the social dimensions of their lives through:
 - Cultural events, theater programs and workshops.
 - Craft development programs.
 - A film to explore and document the social process of restoration, and
 - Documenting the programme on the field.

The task is to find out how the social processes of restoration can create appropriate social conditions for the development of 'a culture of peace'. Recovery, preservation and conservation are an integral part of the social process of restoration. Each has a healing quality and therefore is an integral feature of the culture of peace.

Main Objectives of the Project

- Highlight the need to preserve symbols of history and past traditions to reaffirm people's identity
- understand the people's perceptions of their history and traditions and re-energise them to preserve their heritage
- work with them to find ways of overcoming conflicts and prepare the ground for the formation of a positive identity
- highlight the importance of the spiritual traditions of the land to uplift values of freedom and tolerance
- highlight the need to consider future generations while dealing with present day conflicts.
- develop and highlight the importance of the craft traditions of their land, to deepen the significance of the values of freedom, mercy and tolerance in everyday life.
- establish an annual program which through learning and entertainment, enables them to appreciate the significance of their traditional roots for the promotion of peace.
- interface between the government and the community, through the UNVs, to interpret and implement the governments' sustainable development programmes for – such as: education, health, and hygiene
- work with children and youth, women and elders to identify 'cultural volunteers' who will initiate others in the community to work along with them.

Restoration is a social process;
it has healing qualities since it defines three aspects of civil society:
recovery, preservation and conservation

Your Assistance is Valuable and Essential

Support for this project has been found at various levels and project work has started with the funds that have been received so far. Donations from individuals showing their personal support are as valuable as large institutional funds. In the International Year for the Culture of Peace we invite inputs and financial assistance for this long-term project of peace – which we look forward to replicating in many other villages and states in the new millennium.

Working With the People

The idea and scope of the project can only become meaningful during the process of working with people from different social groups. This allows for an exposure to a diversity of situations and a multiplicity of skills that can contribute to the restoration process.

Three areas have been selected for working with people namely, education, gardening and health. Each of these activities is concerned with recovery, preservation and conservation of the fabric of social life and can thus contribute to our understanding the nature of the material and symbolic reserves generated through this peace process.

The project can be introduced to the people through word of mouth and the local media, . This helps to deepen their concern and interest in their heritage so they can be motivated to get involved in the process and become *champions of the cause* without being biased in any way.

The organizing of a Sufi festival will inspire others and remind them of the legacy of peace and understanding which continues to prevail across this land. The local idiom for communication would be evolved by working with local artists, singers and artisans.

Workshops with the people

A series of workshops will be organised for 2 weeks in January and March 2000, involving children and young adults of Kishankot. The traditional performers of the area, Marasis and Dhadhis will also be initiated to participate. The workshop will integrate and use the diverse elements of creative movement, theatre, song, writing, painting, photography and a collection of personal interpretations and narratives ranging from personal experiences to the historical and mythological.

An important focus of the workshop is to enable the community to assess their links to the environment and understand where they stand in the larger scheme of things. Emphasis will also be placed on generating self-knowledge and skills that can help to connect them with the world outside their own.

To help the people learn how to make their own presentations, participants will develop and make interactive presentations to the community during the workshop. The final multi-media presentation-cum-live-performances in Delhi will evolve out of these presentations made at the local level.

At the local level, the aim of these workshops is to make the temple and its restoration both central and meaningful for the community; and introduce the project – its possibilities, scope, out-reach and long term ramifications – to the world outside.

Outputs

Video Film documenting the restoration process through all its stages, as the work progresses.

Setting-up a school and community centre that can house additional activities such as:

- a library
- reading room
- the sewing centre
- non-formal education centre
- adult literacy centre
- community hall, and
- recreation centre.

Mobilise the community to participate in a range of ongoing development activities: sewage system and waste disposal systems; water tank and garden; alternate energy sources such as solar energy and gohar gas

A craft promotion center.

Setting up of a Non-Formal Education center.

Organise health camps and training programmes for the community and mobilise people to contribute and enrich them.

Organise a Sufi festival.

Conservation and restoration of multiple historic sites in Punjab.

Documentation of historic sites in 6 of the 13 districts in Punjab. The other 7 districts have been documented.

Publications:

- Books for children based on the oral history of Kishankot
- Books narrating stories of wall paintings
- Book of wall paintings
- Book about the process of restoration.