

Ramlila of Ramnagar: An Intangible Heritage of Varanasi

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Concept of Ramlila:

Ramayana means Rama's journey, and Ramlila suggests this journey literally. Thousands of Ramlila are performed all over North India during the month of October, based on the Tulsi Das's Ramayana, one of Hindus most holy epic. Lila means play: sport in the sense of divine play human world is there to entertain the Gods. Ramnagar, 15 km. from Varanasi presents the Ramlila started by the erstwhile Maharaja of Kashi in the most traditional style. The only one in India where performances last for 31 days, marked by detailed dialogues and impressive enactments. Hundreds of sadhus come to Ramnagar to watch and recite the epic. Permanent structures are built and spaces designated to represent the main locales of the story i.e. Ashok Vatika, Janakpuri, Panchvati, Lanka etc. transforming the whole township into a vast Ramlila ground. The audience move along with the performers with every episode. To maintain the authenticity character of the Ramlila, electric lights, mikes and loudspeakers are not used, though the average audience is rarely less than ten thousand. The festival itself transforms an area of many square miles. Some of the stages are enclosures in the middle of the town, others are deep in what was once forest and jungle, or on grassy hillsides and in open fields, or amid large gardens of fragrant blooming trees and temples and marble gazebos built by former maharajahs. Even Maharaja's fort becomes one of the stages in the play.

Concept of Intangible Heritage:

UNESCO has prepared the Lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage aiming to ensure the better protection of important intangible cultural heritages worldwide and the awareness of their significance. Through a compendium of the different oral and intangible treasures of humankind worldwide, the program aims to draw attention to the importance of safeguarding intangible heritage, which has been identified by UNESCO as an essential component and a repository of cultural diversity and

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creative expression.

The program currently compiles two lists. The longer *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* comprises cultural "practices and expressions [that] help demonstrate the diversity of this heritage and raise awareness about its importance." The shorter *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* is composed of those cultural elements that concerned communities and countries consider require urgent measures to keep them alive India has yet able to inscribe only eight (three mentioned below) such Heritages in the UNESCO's *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage viz.*

- Chhau dance of Eastern India.
- Kalbelia folk songs and dances of Rajasthan.
- Mudi yettu, ritual theatre and dance drama of Kerala.

Concept of Sustainable Tourism:

"Sustainable tourism" is often equated with nature or eco-tourism; but sustainable tourism development means more than protecting the natural environment - it means proper consideration of host peoples, communities, cultures, customs, lifestyles, and social and economic systems. It is tourism that truly benefits those who are on the receiving end, and that does not exploit and degrade the environment in which they live and from which they must earn a living after the last tourist has gone back home. It is tourism that enhances the material life of local communities, without causing a loss of traditional employment systems, acculturation or social disruption. Sustainable development (and therefore sustainable tourism) takes into account three central points:

- the necessary interactions between the environment and economic activity;
- long-term time scale; and
- Inter- as well as intra-generational equity - providing for the needs of current societies without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Correlation of Ramlila of Ramnagar with Intangible Heritage and Sustainability:

The tourists to Varanasi are normally confined to the Ghats (Ganges' river front) and Sarnath which have become stereotype for the city as a tourist destination.

Hence it is seriously felt that the tourism must look for some greater enchantment for tourists by taking them to such areas and localities and thereby to acquaint them with such socio-religious practices of the country folks which can make their visit even more worthwhile. Hence Ramlila of Ramnagar which is held every year in October, also the typical Tourist season for Varanasi can be developed as a new attraction for Tourist coming here. The concept of Sustainability comes into play as now tourist spends lesser time in the city and more at Ramnagar within that 31 days of the play which means less burden on the existing infrastructure of the city, more interaction between environment and tourist as the plays are performed at picturesque locations and more possibility of equitable distribution of tourist dollar (Spending). Thus all the three important essentials of sustainable approach have been met by this particular event.

It makes it obligatory on the various governments (132 of them) who have ratified the UNESCO's Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and who nominates heritage elements, to ensure that necessary measures, including legal and financial, are undertaken to safeguard them. On its part, the UNESCO would facilitate international cooperation, provide financial assistance and extend support for studies, provision of experts, training and creation of infrastructure. The Ramlila of Ramnagar has all the qualities to be nominated for the list as one side it has the novelty of drama presentation in the form of narration on the other side it has the unique feature of dedicated/religiously motivated audience from all walks of life irrespective of their caste, creed and religion.

Objectives of the study :

- To assess that can Ramlila of Ramnagar be developed under a sustainable tourism development approach.
- To adjudged Ramlila as an Intangible heritage of Ramnagar.
- To evaluate the untapped potentials of the destination.
- To look for a new tourist attraction in Varanasi befitting the quest of International tourists to India.
- To understand International tourists coming to Varanasi.
- To find out International Tourist's Perception of Varanasi.
- To study the perception regarding infrastructural facilities provided at various sites.

Research methodology :**Table-1: Hypotheses**

Question s	Strongly Agree (5)	Agree (4)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly Disagree (1)	Total
1. Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a sustainable Tourism development approach.	46	35	08	04	00	93
2. Ramlila of Ramnagar is an Intangible Heritage	24	12	13	16	05	70
3. There an untapped potentials of the destination	19	25	10	04	02	60
Total	89	72	31	24	07	223

Table-2: Hypothesis 1

Question	Option	Points on	Respondents (R)	P*R	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a sustainable Tourism development approach.	Strongly Agree	5	46	230		
	Agree	4	35	140		
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	8	24		
	Disagree	2	04	08		
	Strongly Disagree	1	00	00		
			93	402	4.32	3.74

Hypothesis 1: Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a sustainable Tourism development approach.

Applying the equations the upper limit and lower limit have found to be 3.76 and 2.24 respectively. When we draw normal distribution curve the survey mean which is found to be 4.32 falls outside the curve (see Figure-1). As mean 4.32(see

Table-2) is outside the upper and lower limit as calculated above, falls outside the curve the hypothesis is rejected indicating that respondents agree with the statement that Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a sustainable Tourism development approach.

Table-3: Hypothesis 2

Question	Option	Points on likert's scale(P)	Respondents (R)	P*R	Mean $\Sigma P*R/\Sigma R$	Standard Deviation
2. Ramlila of Ramnagar is an Intangible Heritage.	Strongly Agree	5	24	120		
	Agree	4	12	48		
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	13	24		
	Disagree	2	16	39		
	Strongly Disagree	1	05	05		
			70	244	3.48	5.33

Hypothesis 2: Ramlila of Ramnagar is not suitable to be treated as an Intangible Heritage

Applying the equations the upper limit and lower limit have found to be 4.370 and 1.63

When we draw normal distribution curve the survey mean which is found to be 3.48 falls inside the curve (see figure-2). As mean $\mu < 3$ falls inside the curve the hypothesis is accepted indicating that respondents disagree with the statement that Ramlila of Ramnagar is not an Intangible Heritage.

Hypothesis 3: There is an untapped potential of the destination

Null Hypothesis $\mu=3$. Alternate hypothesis $\mu \neq 3$ which means that μ may be greater or lesser than 3. Applying the equations the upper limit and lower limit have found to be 3.989 and 2.010. When we draw normal distribution curve, the mean which is found to be 3.92 falls outside the curve (see figure-3). As mean $\mu > 3$ which means that μ may be greater or lesser than 3; falls outside the curve the hypothesis is rejected indicating that respondents agree with the statement that there is an untapped potential of the destination

Table-4: Hypothesis 3

Question	Option	Points on likert's scale(P)	Respondents (R)	P*R	Mean $\Sigma P*R/\Sigma R$	Standard Deviation
2 There is an untapped potential of the destination	Strongly Agree	5	19	95		
	Agree	4	25	100		
	Neither Agree nor Disagree	3	10	30		
	Disagree	2	04	08		
	Strongly Disagree	1	02	02		
			60	235	3.92	3.38

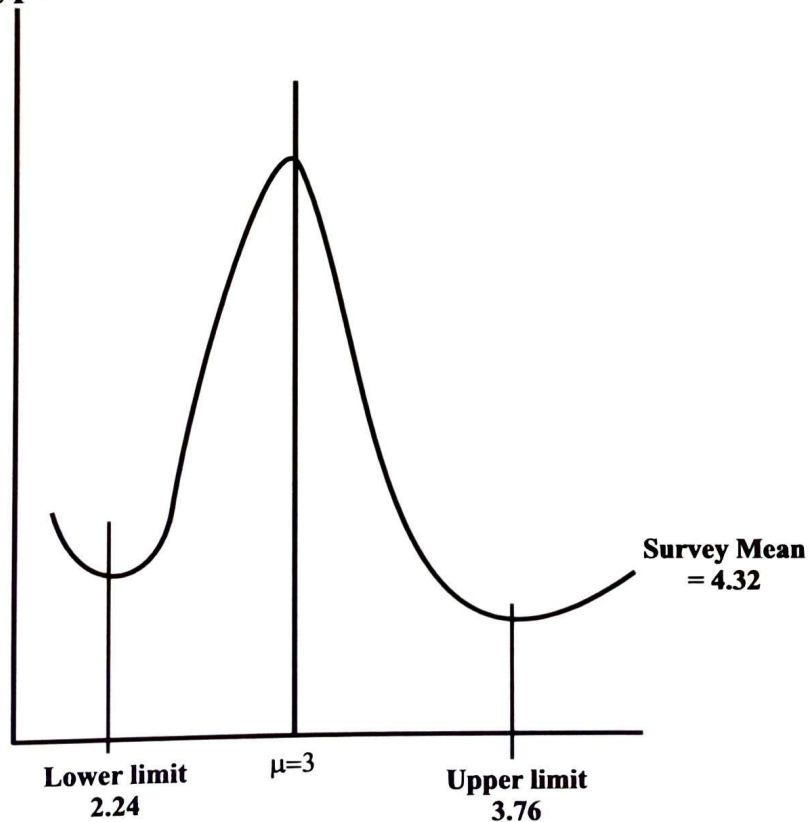
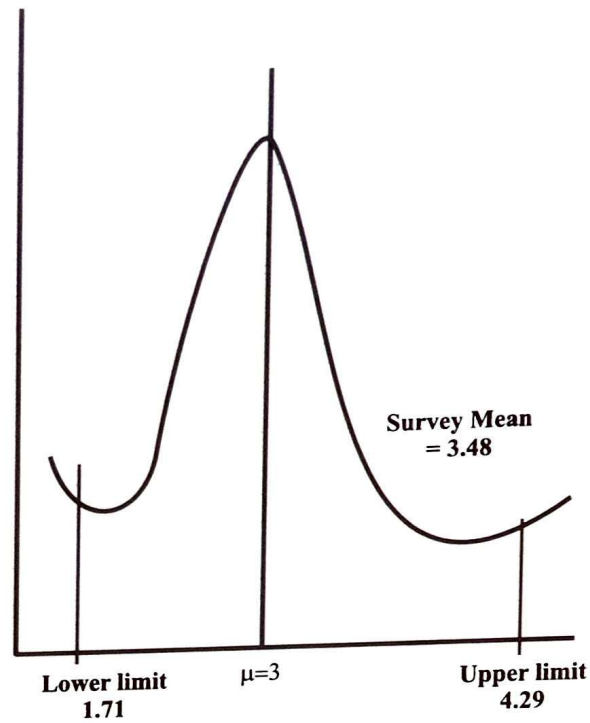
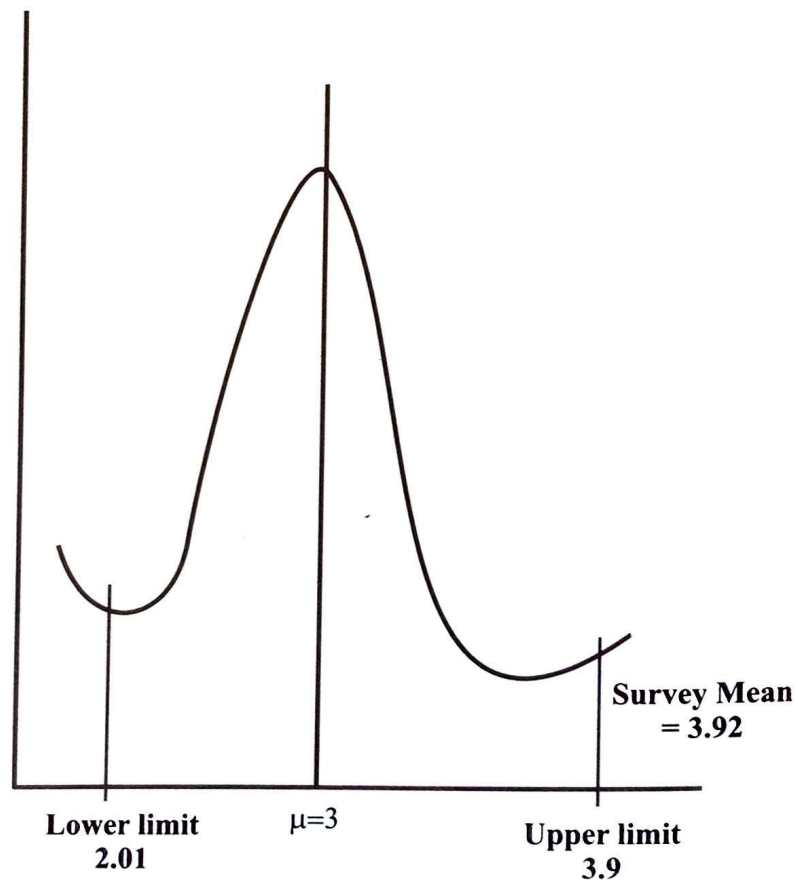
Figure-1: Hypothesis 1

Figure-2: Hypothesis 2**Figure-3: Hypothesis 3**

Major Findings :

Since Ramnagar is only 15 kms from Varanasi, one of the biggest Tourist attractions in the region so the sample survey is being done on International Tourists coming to Varanasi who can be encouraged /attracted to visit Ramnagar.

- Respondents strongly agree that Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a sustainable Tourism development approach.
- Respondents strongly agree that Ramlila of Ramnagar is an Intangible heritage of Varanasi.
- Respondents strongly agree that there is an untapped potential of the destination.
- The distribution of sample units by tourist generating areas shows that the U.K. (35%) followed by Americas (25%) and Far East (18%) is major tourist generating area to Varanasi/Ramnagar.
- The distribution of sample unit by Age shows that a majority of the sample tourist (45%) is from age group more than 45 years of Age .
- The International tourist coming to Varanasi & staying at star category accommodation is predominately organized tour (80%).
- The Sex wise distribution of sample units reveals that the male tourist exceeds the female tourist by 10%.
- The occupation of sample unit is largely distributed between retired (40%) & private sector employee (32%).
- The distribution of sample unit reveals that number of international tourists is Graduate (60%) followed by SSC (35%).
- The distribution of sample units defines that only once International tourist wishes to visit Varanasi/Ramnagar (95%) & there is only (5%) repeat visit.
- The distribution of sample units by hobbies of International tourist is basically reading books (53%) followed by gardening (23%).
- The distribution of sample units by Purpose of Visit to Varanasi/Ramnagar is mainly divided into Spiritual (48%) & Cultural (42%).
- The distribution sample unit by the likeness of infrastructural facilities like

clean drinking water, refreshments, and toilets is primarily is poor (80%) who consider Varanasi/Ramnagar as not a good Tourist destination in terms of basic infrastructure.

- But 70% of them consider the maintenance of monuments/ historical places in Varanasi are satisfactory. In terms of guide facility 75% of the sample tourist finds it good while 20% consider it satisfactory which is an encouraging proposition also. The sign board for direction, maintenance, knowledge of monuments, buildings etc are good (60%) whereas 33% of them consider it satisfactory.
- Thus one can easily deduce that the International Tourist is dissatisfied by basic infrastructure facilities but tourist infrastructure is to some extent is considered good by them which acts as succor.
- The sample unit finds 63% of the attitude of the host population as friendly whereas 26% consider it hostile. The basic reason behind the high friendly percentage is that 80% of the sample unit comes through organized tour format and they have least interaction with host population.
- The majority of the sample units (90%) find information about Ramlila of Ramnagar on websites which they think as poorly maintained and not properly updated. They think that if there is proper interactive website it will be very beneficial for the tourist coming to Varanasi as well as tap the Potential of Tourism Sector.
- This seems to be an interesting proposition when international tourist being asked if they wish to visit those places of Ramnagar which are in close proximity to their planned itinerary and do not feature in it, then 88% answered in positive.

Conclusion:

The biggest challenge before Tourism sector is the issue of sustainability where there is an urgent need for all inclusive growth on one hand and the safe keeping of interest of major stake-holders i.e., the host population on the other hand without disturbing the existing social, cultural and ecological fiber of the place. The Ramlila of Ramnagar has the potential for growth where the first “A” i.e. Attraction is taken care of and the necessary funds for further developing the other areas of Tourism is possible when this event is properly supported by UNESCO's Intangible Heritage section. As also in the survey result, the respondents strongly agree that Ramlila of Ramnagar can be developed as a

Sustainable tourism development approach, as an Intangible heritage and also it has an untapped potential for growth. Thus it is the high time when this issue is taken at a proper forum and platform so that rich dividends can be sought from this so that it becomes a win-win situation for all parties' viz. Tourist service providers & host population.

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