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Heritage and Tourism: Alternative Perspectives from South Asia

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Abstract

This paper examines the typical ways in which mass tourism has utilized cultural heritage as a salient asset for development. Tourism has long focused on extraordinary, exotic and grand heritage assets at the expense of ordinary, mundane elements the human past that are part of the everyday lives of ordinary people. The paper argues that there are numerous ways in which ordinary heritage should be researched better in South Asia, how it might be used as a tourism resource, and as a tool for community empowerment. The paper focuses on language, Indigenous minorities, religion, traditional livelihoods, and food as exemplars of ordinary heritage with significant potential for tourism and for heritage protection.

Keywords: South Asia, Heritage, Ordinary People, Cuisine, Language, Indigenous People, Religion, Livelihoods

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INTRODUCTION

Heritage includes the things we humans inherit from the past and utilize and value in the present. It entails a sense of belongingness and connection to place. Inheritances (heritage) may be natural or cultural, as well as tangible or intangible. Heritage may be of ancient origins or of recent vintage, and it may be extraordinary or rather ordinary and mundane (Timothy, 2021a). Cultural heritage is utilized by many sectors of society. Governments use it as a propaganda tool or as a means of constructing nationhood. Schools and universities use it as a formal education medium. Curators and archaeologists utilize it for scientific, educational, and conservation purposes. Communities use it for building solidarity and commemorating important events and peoples, and as this paper highlights, communities, governments, and private enterprises exploit cultural heritage for the development of tourism. Heritage tourism is one of the most pervasive forms of tourism in the world and envelops many other types of tourism, such as dark tourism, agritourism, religious tourism, and culinary tourism, to name only a few. Most tourism types in fact have a strong heritage element, even if they are not interpreted within a heritage framework. Although most heritage tourism to date has centered on highly visible and extravagant historic sites and cultural performances, heritage is much more than that and needs to be examined more broadly. This is especially true in the less developed parts of the world. Globally, consumer tastes for cultural heritage experiences are broadening beyond traditional ostentatious heritage resources, such as historic cities, ancient temples, fabulous buildings, and archaeological sites, to encompass more everyday manifestations of the human past as travelers desire to appreciate how ordinary people live their lives (Podder et al., 2018; Pielesiak, 2015; Taylor, 2004; Timothy, 2014b).

This position paper examines some of the traditional views of heritage from the perspective of tourism and suggests that destination countries and regions should be more holistic and inclusive of their various heritages for recognition, conservation, and promotion beyond what mass tourism has traditionally determined to be 'heritage'. The paper takes a supply-side view, arguing that heritage beyond the normative extraordinary manifestations of culture has potential to benefit from tourism and vice versa. After examining the evolving relationship between cultural heritage and tourism, this paper describes several largely neglected areas of cultural heritage in which future tourism research could be fruitfully brought to bear in the context of South Asia.

HERITAGE AND TOURISM

In accordance with the definition provided earlier, heritage encompasses all elements of human culture, including language, religion, artistic and creative expressions, celebrations, and innovations. Family structure and filial relations, folklore and poetry, music and dance, vernacular architecture, archaeological sites, food and culinary traditions, agricultural practices and patterns, linguistic expressions, faith and religion, and social networks are only a few of the multitudes of ingredients that make up humankind's cultural patrimony. Thus, heritage is generally broadly defined, yet we often think of it in simplistic terms. Overwhelmingly, the global mass tourism industry has focused for decades on the extraordinary built heritage of nobility, the wealthy, and conquerors and colonizers, as well as the intangible heritage of remarkable Indigenous people, such as their dance, music and other performance traditions—traditions that stand out as being unique and spectacular (Kim et al., 2019; Timothy, 2021a). Yet this tells only a small part of the story of the heritage of humankind (Timothy, 2020). Many people equate heritage with tangible features of a cultural landscape (e.g. buildings, archaeological sites, and artifacts), but such a perspective is myopic and exclusionary of most of humankind's inheritances. In this process, most of the heritage that has been selected for preservation at national and global levels, and to sell to tourists, has been that of an exceptional and extraordinary nature.

Most of the limited public funds available in many countries for protecting and promoting heritage are funneled to projects that emphasize the grandiose and extraordinary, leaving many people's commonplace heritage unprotected or undervalued both in economic and socio-cultural terms. This tendency may be politically motivated or a result of the realization that grander heritage may touch a larger segment of society and attract more tourists. Thus, in many areas of the world, economic value far outweighs the social value of heritage (Timothy, 2021b). In this process, the imposing elements of the past are made heritage and valorized, while the mundane past of ordinary people is simultaneously disinherited through a lack of community appreciation, funding and protection, and consumer attention. Thus, the question must be asked: what about the ordinary heritage of ordinary people? This question has been raised several times in different ways by the author in the hope that communities will begin to appreciate better their own familiar heritage and look not only to the large-scale and grandiose heritage that is so frequently promoted in most tourism contexts (Timothy 2014a, 2014b, 2018, 2020, 2021b). Small-scale

ordinary heritage adds social value to places and can help support a region's identity and sense of solidarity among diverse community members.

The process of disinheritance is especially problematic in the Global South, including South Asia, where scale is an important consideration for communities and the tourism sector (Timothy, 1997). At the national level, the administrators charged with protecting and marketing heritage must necessarily focus on sites and places of national and international appeal. Downscale heritage, such as that of a regional or very local consequence, must be heralded by the communities to which they belong. With little public funding available for small-scale and local heritage, such efforts usually require a great deal of volunteer labor and small donations. However, in many parts of the developing world, the primary challenge to small-scale heritage is a frequent lack of recognition by communities of their own heritage value. The self-deprecating notion that "we have nothing to offer because we are just simple peasants" still pervades heritage valuation in much of the developing world (Timothy, 2021b).

This again illustrates the impact of scale and different ways of understanding what heritage actually means. Local traditions, handicrafts, modes of transportation, village temples, and subsistence farming often escape local inhabitants' heritage radar, because they are conditioned to think of heritage, in the tourism context at least, as being marvelous, outstanding or exotic (Timothy, 2021b). There may also even be linguistic differences that cause people to think differently about heritage and tourism. For example, the Nepali word *sampada* means wealth or wealthy with a connotation of social inheritance. However, *sampada* is also the common term used in Nepal for the Western notion of heritage, as in heritage tourism, which conjures up the notion of exceptional and exotic (Nyaupane, 2020). Thus, even the words used in various languages can condition people's thinking of what heritage means and how it should be valued. If heritage within a particular culture connotes social wealth and magnificence, then perhaps heritage would be seen only as grandiose treasures rather than ordinary places, items, and activities.

UNESCO's World Heritage program has also been complicit in perpetuating the idea that heritage is extraordinary, exotic, and 'Othered'. The World Heritage List's emphasis on globally significant, outstanding, and universally valuable built heritage empowers many places that have great heritage but somehow simultaneously disempowers places that lack exotic and 'outstanding' heritage. However, the agency's recognition of representative

cultural landscapes in 1992 and intangible heritage in 2003 illustrates a broadening recognition of cultural heritage beyond the grandiose. At the end of 2020, South Asia was home to 59 UNESCO World Heritage Sites (WHSs)—38 in India, 8 in Sri Lanka, 6 in Pakistan, 4 in Nepal and 3 in Bangladesh (UNESCO, 2020b). Although Bhutan and the Maldives do not yet have any WHSs, both of them have properties listed on the Tentative List of World Heritage. On UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage are 22 living cultural elements in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (UNESCO, 2020a).

The world recognizes the magnificence of South Asia's monumental pre-colonial and colonial heritage (e.g. UNESCO), but the question posed earlier remains: what about the region's ordinary heritage? Is it also worth valorizing? A willingness among scholars, even if it is not yet popular, to address this overarching concern has the potential to give voice to the voiceless and recognize worthwhile heritages that might not have been commemorated or acknowledged on the global stage. Such efforts may be key in helping to protect the region's vernacular heritage, ordinary places, and intangible cultures.

South Asia is rich in tangible and intangible cultural heritage, both extraordinary and ordinary (Silva & Sinha, 2017). Along with its natural bounties, the region's main appeal is its globally recognized and iconic heritage sites. However, South Asia has much more to offer tourism and cultural enthusiasts, including vernacular landscapes, ordinary heritage, everyday practices, and living cultures, which together comprise a vast heritage system that is worthy of additional scholarly attention. The sections that follow describe several manifestations of ordinary heritage that have not been well researched in the international literature but which have a great deal of research potential as work from other parts of the world illustrates.

THE LIVING HERITAGE OF LANGUAGE

A considerably large research archive deals with the 'language of tourism' or how 'tourismspeak' develops and how language and tourism influence and depend upon one another as a communication medium between tourists and service providers, the linguistic needs in the hospitality sector, and the use of language in tourism marketing (Cohen & Cooper, 1986; Dann, 1996; Nomnian et al., 2020; Salim et al., 2012). However, few scholars have

examined the relationships between language, authenticity, and cultural heritage experiences in the context of tourism (Hall-Lew & Lew, 2014; Hall-Lew et al., 2015; Timothy, 2021a).

The use of Indigenous and local languages has been shown to increase a destination's cultural authenticity in the eyes of tourists when it is spoken or when they see it written in interpretive media at museums and historic sites (Timothy, 2021a; Whitney-Squire et al., 2018). Lew, Hall-Lew and Fairs (2014) examined the role of language as a cultural heritage asset in Scotland and Malaysia. They found that tourists appreciated hearing local languages and dialects, which enhanced their cultural experience. In Sabah, Malaysia, foreign tourists had relatively little previous awareness of local languages, but they had a keen interest in hearing, and hearing about, local vernaculars. The marketing potential of Sabahan languages as a cultural attraction was highest among Malaysian tourists. In Scotland, the same study found that a thick Scottish accent and the use of Scots and Scottish Gaelic have an important role to play in how people experience Scottish culture. Interest in, and the marketability of, Scotland's dialects and languages were very high among British, European and global tourists.

In South Asia, there is potential for utilizing language as a heritage asset. There are approximately 20,000 languages and tribal dialects spoken throughout South Asia, although officially there are far fewer (Kachru et al., 2008). The languages of South Asia are famous for their connections to religion and education, and as the vernacular of exotic poetry. Sanskrit, the classical language of the region, is inextricably linked to Hinduism and Hindu philosophy, as well as the holy writ of Buddhism and Jainism, and it lies at the foundations of many of South Asia's other languages (Burrow, 2001; Pollock, 2006). The linguistic heritage of the region is crucial not only for everyday communication but also for the identity formation of its people, the affirmation of nationhood, and the development of art, music, and religion. There is considerable scope for research into South Asian languages, especially minority languages, as a salient component of the region's heritage milieu. Language's inextricable connection to other elements of cultural heritage and how this might play a role in the broader heritage narrative needs further exploration. What roles might major and minor languages play in interpreting heritage for regional visitors? How might the expression of vernaculars increase the experiential value of tourists in the region, and how might the recognition of minority languages as important heritage elements help empower ethnic

minorities socially, psychologically, and economically? All of these are important questions to address, especially as they pertain to heritage management and tourism.

INDIGENOUS MINORITIES

Indigenous minority populations have come to play an extremely important role in tourism throughout the world. Much research has examined the role(s) of Native People in the hospitality sector, their living cultures as heritage assets for tourism, and the impacts of tourism on their cultural values and practices. Research on Indigenous cultures has proliferated in China, North America, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand. However, there is a dearth of knowledge about tourism and the Indigenous people (tribal societies) of South Asia, with relatively few exceptions, such as the work by Jha et al. (2017), Patra (2011), Sankar and Mellalli (2019), Shinde (2010), and Thimm and Karlaganis (2020).

Indigenous people are present in several countries of South Asia. For example, in addition to its Bengali majority, Bangladesh has at least 54 Indigenous groups, comprising 1.59 million people who speak some 35 languages (Mamo, 2020). India recognizes 705 ethnic groups as ‘Scheduled Tribes’, or Adivasis. The Adivasis in India number approximately 104 million, or 8.6% of the country’s population, although by law, India considers all Indians to be ‘Indigenous’ (Mamo, 2020, p. 234). Nepal’s Indigenous people (Adivasi Janajati) comprise between 36% and 50% of the country’s population, including 63 tribal groups (Mamo, 2020).

Outsiders visiting tribal or Indigenous people is commonly known as Indigenous tourism or ethnic tourism and is becoming increasingly popular in countries that have sizable Native populations (Carr et al., 2016; Ruhanen & Whitford, 2019). In India and most other areas of South Asia, this form of tourism is known as ‘tribal tourism’ and is a popular product both for foreign and domestic tourists. Thousands of tribal tours are purchased each year and include visits to Indian ethnic minority communities, most commonly in the northeastern states (the ‘Seven Sister States’), the Ladakh region, the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and the state of Odisha. Despite their popularity, tribal tours in India are controversial and have received extensive criticism for their voyeuristic and exploitative nature, as well as the lack of benefits this form of tourism brings to the tribal communities involved (Adivasi Lives Matter, 2019).

Nevertheless, these visits to Indigenous communities continue to be an important part of cultural tourism in India and Nepal.

Given the scarcity of academic knowledge about this form of heritage tourism in South Asia, it would behoove scholars to consider tribal tourism and all that it entails in more depth. What makes this form of Indigenous tourism unique to this region, and why is it seemingly more controversial here than in places such as Thailand, China, and New Zealand? Additional research is needed on community empowerment and disempowerment in the context of tribal heritage to address issues related to who controls culture-based tourism, what elements of native cultures should or should not be shared with outsiders, and if this type of tourism is allowed to continue, how it will benefit the visited communities in more sustainable ways.

RELIGIOUS HERITAGE

Religion is one of the commonest expressions of culture. Pilgrimage is the most devout form of religious tourism, in which people travel to sacred sites for religious or spiritual purposes, either because it is a religious requirement or because they view it as an opportunity to increase their faith, pursue spiritual enlightenment, seek forgiveness for sins, or draw closer to deity. Pilgrimages are among the largest tourist gatherings in the world, and religious travelers of all kinds are among the largest and fastest growing travel niches today (Butler & Suntikul, 2018; Olsen & Timothy, 2021; Yasuda et al., 2018). Pilgrimage and other types of religious tourism have been the focus of much academic attention, and there is a large literature on its motivations, manifestations, and impacts. Religious pilgrimage is also a form of heritage tourism, as people travel to participate in, and appreciate, the tangible and intangible elements of faith. These include features of the built environment (e.g. churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, cathedrals, shrines, cemeteries, religious archaeological sites, and visitor centers), sacred natural areas (e.g. rivers, forests, groves, and mountains), and intangible elements of religious heritage, such as ceremonies and celebrations, sacred rites and rituals, prayers and recitations, music and performances, belief systems, and family traditions. In most faith traditions, the act of pilgrimage itself is an important expression of religious heritage. At the same time, many non-religious tourists also visit religious sites, because these are important and sometimes world famous heritage attractions, such as the multitudes of historical churches in Europe, Shinto shrines in Japan, and Buddhist temples in Southeast Asia.

South Asia is home to many prescribed pilgrimages among Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Jains, and other faiths in the region (Shinde, 2010). Some of them such as the Kumbh Mela are world-renowned, while others are more regional or local in scope. Likewise, South Asia is home to many magnificent shrines, temples, gurdwaras, mosques, and ashrams that draw visitors from all faiths and every corner of the globe. Additionally, many localities have local shrines (folk shrines), festivities, and pilgrimages (folk religiosity) that are important sacred spaces and events for residents but might not exude wider appeal (Freeman, 1999; Lahiri & Bacus, 2004; Suvrathan, 2014).

Understanding the valuation of local sacred spaces and events would go a long way in helping to appreciate the ordinary lives of ordinary people beyond the momentous temples and mosques that attract thousands of worshippers or non-adherent tourists each year. Although many people of South Asia and the Global South in general see their folk religious practices and pilgrimages as mundane and routine, outsiders might see them differently. Religious heritage attracts millions of people across the globe and can be disturbing for devotees trying to worship. South Asia's communities must decide what and how much to share with outsiders, set limits on visitors to their sacred places, and establish how best to manage their ordinary holy heritage.

TRADITIONAL LIVELIHOODS

In the tourism marketplace, there is an increasing interest in understanding, viewing and participating in people's traditional livelihoods. This typically takes place in rural contexts (Aslam & Awang, 2015; Kausar & Nishikawa, 2010), but attention to this area of interest should not preclude urban livelihoods, which are extremely important elements of the heritagescapes of South Asia. Traditional livelihoods include hunting and gathering, agriculture, mining and forestry, handicraft making, and many other means of subsistence. Traditional economic and subsistence activities are a crucial part of human heritage, much of which continues today in many parts of the world, just as it did in ancient times. Tourists appreciating traditional livelihoods can help them better understand people's lives and traditions, and a country's cultural milieu.

Subsistence farming is the most pervasive of all livelihoods in the world today and reflects many heritage characteristics of a people, including the products they cultivate, the means and methods used to sow and grow, their watering and harvesting systems, their modes of storing produce, and the

agricultural landscapes that derive from centuries of human-environment interaction. Agritourism is an important form of heritage tourism that reflects how humans value their environments and how they have managed their ecosystems for millennia. The growing tourism interest in agricultural systems is witness to the importance of traditional livelihoods as heritage products (Sun et al. 2011, 2019; Torabi Farsani et al., 2019).

Several areas of South Asia have seen considerable success in developing agritourism. It is especially popular in Sri Lanka and parts of India, such as Karnataka (Malkanthi & Routry, 2011; Shushma, 2012). Besides India and Sri Lanka, all of the South Asian states have potential for agritourism development, but it has not yet become a major focus for tourism industry leaders in most countries of the region (Bhatta & Ohe, 2019; Bhatta et al., 2019; Islam & Carlsen, 2012). The most celebrated form of agritourism in the region is tea cultivation, with its associated plantation landscapes, colonial and post-colonial infrastructure, processing centers, and retail outlets. This is especially popular in central Sri Lanka and the northeastern states of India (Aslam & Jolliffe, 2015; Jolliffe, 2007; Jolliffe & Aslam, 2009).

There is a lot of unrealized potential for many forms of agritourism throughout South Asia (Aslam, 2014; Firmino, 2014). This is especially true in the context of the ancient Spice Routes (Maritime Silk Roads) between Asia, Eastern Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. The traditional Spice Routes extended between Southeast Asia, South Asia and Europe as early as 1500 BC and lasted into the sixteenth century. Sri Lanka and India were major stops on the spice trade routes and were especially known for black pepper and cinnamon. The plethora of spices grown in South Asia ought to form the foundations of additional agritourism practices, as people from afar tend to be fascinated with produce they use at home but might not understand its origins. Spice tourism, as a manifestation of heritage tourism, is a growing niche market in many parts of the world (Jolliffe, 2014) and has potential to improve the livelihoods of agriculturists in South Asia.

The fishing cultures of India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the Maldives have also been largely ignored in the heritage narratives of the region, yet this traditional livelihood has been extremely instrumental in creating national and regional identities for millennia, including today. Fishing and tourism are the mainstays of the current Maldivian economy, and fishing has played a salient role in the islands' trade and the nation's cultural identity.

Approximately half of the Maldives' population is employed in fishing. The country's cuisine is highly dependent on tuna and other marine resources (Hussain et al., 2012), and much of its modern-day transportation (e.g. inter-island water taxis) derives from its maritime economic history. Although there is a growing fishing tourism sector in the Maldives, from a heritage perspective, fishing is rarely present in the country's heritage narrative, but this could change, as there are currently efforts to focus more on the islands' cultural heritage where sun, sea, and sand-based tourism has long dominated the tourism product (Rasheeda, 2012).

Finally, an exceedingly ubiquitous element of the urban landscapes of South Asia are rickshaws, autorickshaws, and pedicabs. Despite comprising a pervasive livelihood form in South Asia and filling an important position in the spectrum of urban transportation, these have not received much tourism research attention in the region, the way they have been studied in other parts of Asia, such as Macau and Hong Kong (du Cros, 2004; Wong & Kuan, 2014). Rickshaws and autorickshaws are an important part of cityscapes and urban heritage and have contributed significantly to the development of cities throughout all of South Asia (Chhabra et al. 2021; Hyrapiet & Greiner, 2012). They have, in fact, played a role in the romanticization and marketability of cities in developing countries in general (Britton, 1979), including those in India, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Although rickshaws and autorickshaws may not seem to be likely candidates for heritage protection and cultural tourism assets, they are indeed an important part of South Asia's urban heritagescapes that add a significant personality and destination-specific appeal among tourists who desire a truly Indian, Nepali, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or Sri Lankan experience (Chhabra et al., 2021). Additional research attention is sorely needed on the role of ordinary elements of South Asia's urban heritage, such as small-scale transportation providers and hawkers, to understand urban heritage tourism and tourists' experiences more deeply and more holistically. More work is needed to identify the heritage narratives and connections to tourism among other traditional livelihoods in the region.

HERITAGE CUISINES

Another important but often overlooked category of cultural heritage that has started to receive increased research attention is culinary traditions and food (Dixit, 2019; Timothy, 2016). Food is a crucible of cultural knowledge. It tells many stories of indigeneity, colonialism, wealth and poverty, peasantry, caste systems, people's efforts to survive in harsh environments, as well as the role of religion and other elements of culture in the development of national and regional gastronomy (Timothy & Ron, 2013a, 2013b). In the words of Mirza (2020: n.p.), "It's often the kitchen that carries the weight of a culture on its shoulders; food can be the purest distillation of a people".

Each region of South Asia has unique ways of growing, processing, preparing, serving, and consuming food items (Das & Deka, 2012; Narzary et al., 2016; Sanmugam & Kasinathan, 2011). Flavors, spices, and ingredients often vary from one area to another, making some regional gustatory differences obvious, while others are more subtle and only perceptible to local inhabitants. Religious prohibitions or requirements may determine which foods should or should not be eaten, and they also govern many of the means of food preparation. Climatic and physiographic variations (e.g. elevations, water availability, average temperatures, and soil composition) also determine the types of culinary traditions that develop.

In the context of colonial South Asia, the British, Portuguese, and French presence also had an imprint on the cuisines of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka (Mangalassary, 2016). British-influenced cookery can be seen in Mumbai and Kolkata. French-Indian fusion foods are popular in Puducherry, and the Portuguese culinary transplants in Goa, Diu, and Daman have rendered Indian-Portuguese fusion foods one of the most popular in India (Rosales, 2012). Their mountainous isolation and the lack of colonial control over Bhutan and Nepal enabled those countries to maintain purer and more traditional gastronomies.

Just as olives and olive oil have laid the foundation for the alimentary identities of Mediterranean societies (Alonso & Krajsic, 2013; Oplanić et al. 2020), cinnamon, coconut milk, and chili peppers are the essence of much Sri Lankan cuisine (Adikari & Lamkali, 2016). Diverse spices are the quintessential foundations of Indian regional gastronomy (Appadurai, 1988; Takeda et al., 2008), and tuna fish and coconut are essential ingredients in many

Maldivian dishes (Hussain et al., 2012). Some traditional cuisines have been raised to the status of national identity-maker and have become highly political (Ichijo & Ranta, 2016; Ramshaw, 2016). Likewise, among most diasporas, food is one of the strongest bonds and connections to the homeland, as it protects Indigenous knowledge, maintains a foothold in the motherland, keeps the flames of patriotism burning, and creates a common bond between migrant ethnic groups and expatriate nationalities abroad (Chhabra et al., 2013; Frost & Laing, 2016; Kaftanoglu & Timothy, 2013).

Scholars have written a great deal about food and culinary traditions, but relatively few have framed their research from a heritage perspective. This deficiency is particularly acute in South Asia, yet the region is home to such a wide-ranging and diverse array of culinary traditions. Food is an ordinary part of South Asian life, but for outsiders looking in, it is rather extraordinary and exotic. The academic community knows very little about regional variations, tastes and perceptions, and how these might play out in a tourism context. The emerging research on herbs, spices, and fragrances in other parts of the world (e.g. Boswell, 2008; Jolliffe, 2014; Lak et al., 2020; Torabi Farsani et al., 2018) could easily be transferred to South Asia, where many of the globe's spice traditions originated. As already noted, spice production has a lot of potential for tourism, and while it seems rather ordinary, it could be elevated to a considerable status the way it has been done in other parts of the world (Jolliffe, 2014). The important role of Sri Lanka and India on the ancient Spice Routes and the pervasiveness of Indian and Pakistani cuisine overseas among their diasporas but also in many restaurants for general consumption reveals much about the position of South Asia in the world's foodscapes (Chhabra et al., 2013).

Although the foods of South Asia share many roots and similarities, the realm abounds in unique regional cuisines that reveal much about the histories and cultures of the area. These differences are an important attraction for food tourists in the region (Updhyay & Sharama, 2014). For example, Nepal, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are all known for their regional specialties of generally common foods, such as curries and rotis. Likewise, the Parsi/Irani specialties of Mumbai are an exceptional point of pride in that city and reveal some of the intricacies of India's Iranian diaspora, which have helped maintain the Parsi identity in India for centuries (Mirza, 2020). Some foods stand out as regional or national identity markers, such as nihani and biryani in Pakistan. Bhutan's red rice dishes are unique to that Himalayan kingdom because it is the

only rice variety that can grow in that country's high elevations. Yak meat and yak cheese products abound in the Himalayas, and the culinary traditions of Nepal are influenced heavily by ethnic differences and physical geography (elevations), with considerable variations between highland and lowland cuisines and between the food cultures of the country's tribal communities. All of these issues reflect the history and cultural heritage of South Asia and have the potential to cement their place on the foodie tourism map of the region. There is considerable room for South Asia's culinary heritage to become the focus of promotional efforts the way regional foods have been emphasized for tourism in other parts of the world (e.g. Everett, 2016; Lai et al., 2019; Seo et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this descriptive position paper is to stimulate readers into thinking more broadly about what heritage means in South Asia and elsewhere. In many parts of the world, the concept of cultural heritage is constrained by misconceptions, localized definitions, restrictive terminologies, linguistic and historical differences, unawareness, and even politics. Yet, from a global perspective, heritage is vast and inclusive. Although mass tourism has traditionally focused on outstanding representations of the human past, it is clear that heritage is far broader than that. This paper focused on language, Indigenous minorities, religious customs, traditional livelihoods, and foodways to illustrate how we might think more broadly about the meaning of heritage and its operationalization in tourism. While these and other ordinary manifestations of South Asian heritage might not appeal to the international masses, they very likely would appeal to special interest travelers who desire to know how Indians, Bhutanese, Nepalese, Bangladeshis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans, and Maldivians live and convey their heritage. There are many more ordinary heritage elements that were not included in this essay but which should be systematically researched by heritage and tourism specialists. Scholars have a long way to go in identifying, studying and making sense of South Asia's vast laboratory of cultural heritage and its tourism potential.

Heritage is not a static concept. It continues to change and evolve. Heritage, even ordinary heritage, is frequently a pawn in political rivalries within and between countries, sometimes resulting in competing narratives of how nationalism and nationhood should look. Also, what current generations value as heritage in many cases is far different to what former generations might

have valorized. Perspectives on the meaning and content of heritage are shifting as part of the movement towards more sustainable communities, community empowerment, and community-based tourism. Part of this growing awareness, societies today are beginning to realize that once a heritage element is lost, it is gone forever. Examples of this have been noted in recent years with regard to minority languages in Europe and Asia. Several small-scale languages and cultures in South Asia are also in danger of being lost (e.g. the Kusunda people and their language in Nepal). Thus, it is crucial for societies everywhere to value humankind's past in all its forms and manifestations, not only the opulent remnants of the ruling elites. While the mindset of heritage as 'extraordinary and exotic' continues to dominate thinking in heritage and tourism studies in most non-Western societies, there are some nascent signs of change.

Different cultures and nationalities see heritage and tourism differently, which may be the case in South Asia. However, the heritagization of ordinary places, people, and events represents a step forward in what Ray (2019) calls the decolonization of heritage in India and its neighbors. Niche market-based tourism, rather than mass tourism, may have a role to play in decolonizing heritage, valuing heritage regardless of nationality and culture, and in protecting the endangered heritage of the ordinary classes (Whitney-Squire et al., 2018). However, this requires a concerted research effort to understand this role of tourism in different contexts. Obviously not all ordinary heritage can be conserved, protected, managed, funded, interpreted, and visited, nor is tourism necessarily desirable or commercially viable in all cultural situations. Nonetheless, efforts can be made to seriously consider the importance of protecting a cross-section of elements of ordinary heritage as representative samples of South Asia's diverse cultures and as a break from the tradition that dominates much of the developing world—that of valorizing above all else the colonial and elitist heritagescapes.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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