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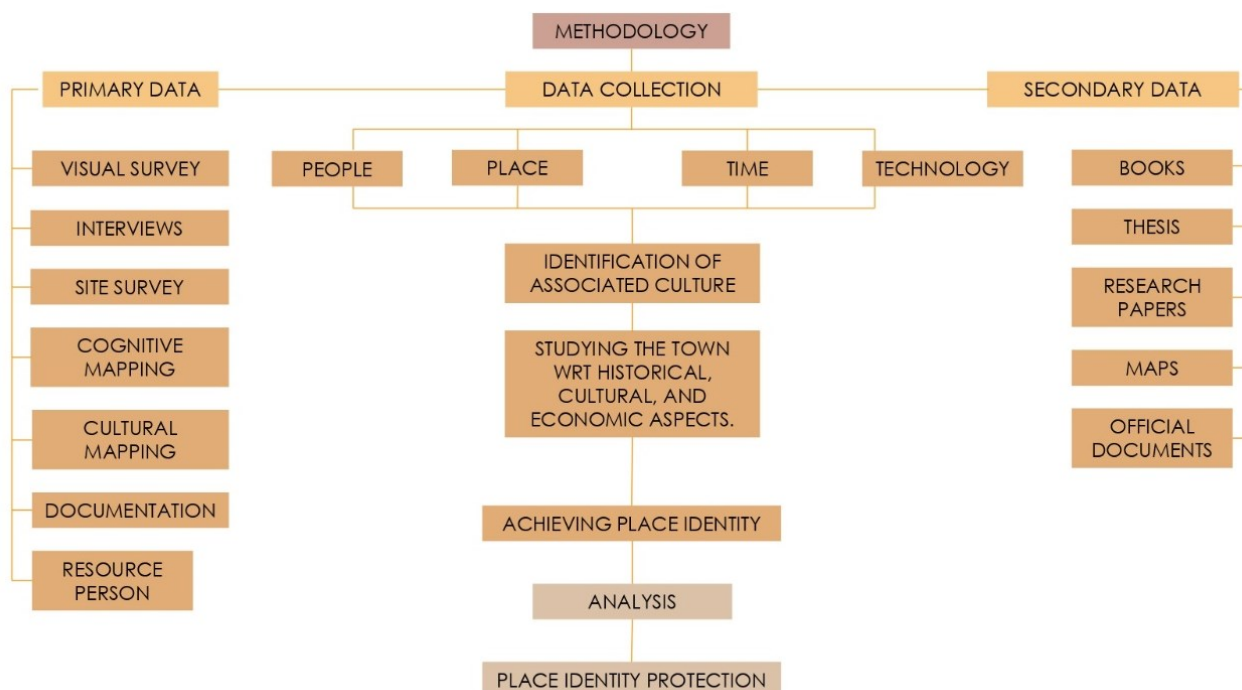
## Place Identity translating into Culture: the town of Rajapur in the cultural region of Konkan

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### 1 Abstract

This paper deals in defining the place identity of cultural town of Rajapur, located in the Konkan region. Rajapur is the valley situated at the confluence of the 'Arjuna' and 'Godi' river. Artistic temples, attractive mosques, Peshwa period structures at Jawahar Chowk and Varchi Peth are all adorning the town. The settlements of Rajapur that are the subject of this study have historical and cultural values with structures of regional culture, natural patterns, and traditions. Today, some parts of these settlements are totally neglected due to changing lifestyles, socio-economic conditions, and approaches towards rural areas. Paradoxically, Konkan is known for the coast and is the main magnet for a day's tourist destination. The heritage is losing its identity due to unsustainable tourism, development pressure, social, economic and political issues. However, Rajapur consists rich history, cultural background, traditional housing, geology, and other factors that make it an important town in South Konkan.

**Keywords:** Konkan; Rajapur; Heritage; Culture; Kuldevata



**Figure 1** Structure of the Study

### 2 Introduction

The word "Konkan" originates from Sanskrit, where 'kona' means corner and 'kana' means piece; thus, translating to "piece of earth".

The Konkan region is the most beautiful land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea at the western coastline of India and is known as a little slice of the paradise of Maharashtra. The region consists of coastal districts such as Raigad, Ratnagiri, Sindhudurg, and Thane.

The region is traversed by seasonal rivers that drain the heavy monsoonal rainfall from the crest of the Sahyadri Hills. The generally uneven terrain is composed of eroded remnant ranges of the Ghats that form low lateritic plateaus in the west and terminate in a coastline of alternating bays and headlands.

## 2.1 Regional identity

Regional identity refers to the unique cultural, social, and historical characteristics that define a specific region. It includes shared values, traditions, customs, language, and way of life. Factors such as geography, history, culture, and socio-economic aspects shape regional identity. It is expressed through festivals, traditions, and community organizations, and can evolve over time due to globalization and other influences.

## 2.2 Place Identity

The place identity that individuals assign to a location is created to set one location apart from others. People who live in or outside of those locations ascribe or perceive differences between those locations. It is a subjective social construct that is founded on objective physical settings to some extent, if not totally.

## 2.3 Culture

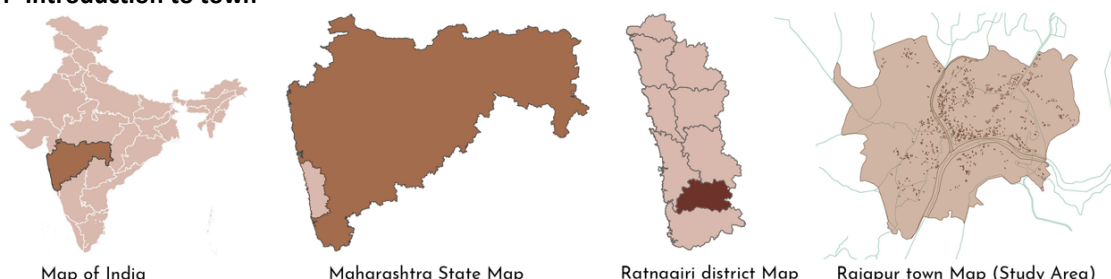
Culture is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the entire fabric of a society, encompassing various aspects of human life and expression (Aziz Amen, 2017; Aziz Amen & Nia, 2018; Amen & Kuzovic, 2018; Amen & Nia, 2021). It is through culture that people give meaning to their existence, form social bonds, and pass on their heritage to future generations.

The geography of Konkan has historically influenced the development of different dialects and even languages in the region. The remnants of the Maratha empire further highlight the historical significance of Konkan. Konkan is known for its natural beauty, including stunning backwaters and beaches like Bhatye beach, Ganeshgule, Aare Ware, Ganpatipule, Jaigad, Anjarle, and Hedvi.

- Due to Maritime trade, contact of foreigners with Konkan was natural from ancient days. Konkan's economy in historic times depended on maritime trade and ancillary industries, and on the plantations growing coconut, betel-nut, cashew, mango, jack-fruit, Kokam, Vari, Nachani, and rice.
- Konkan is home to a lot of art forms. Such as *Ganjifa card-making*, *kaavi art*, *Gondhal*, *Balya dance*, *Kirtan*, *Fugdi*, etc.

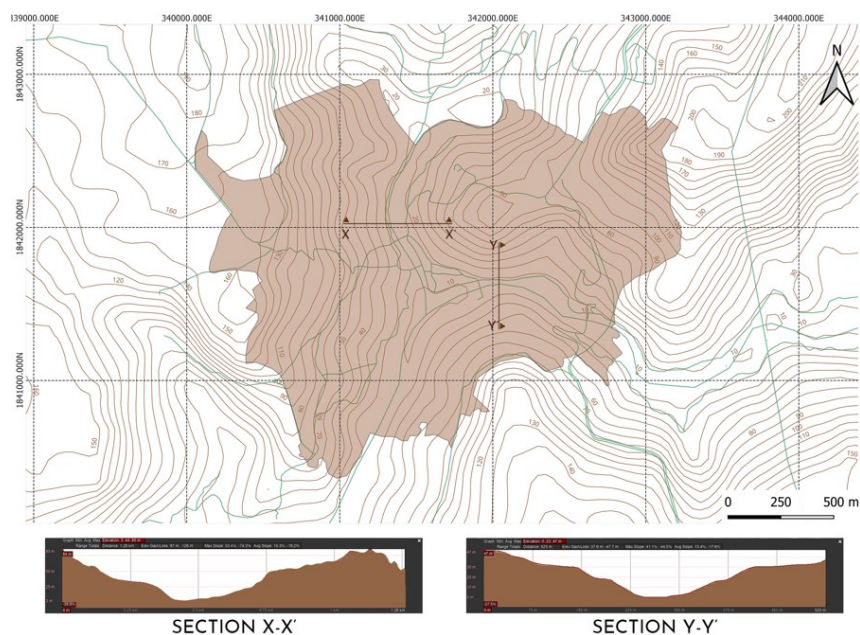
The local deity has a significant role to play in religion. *Maruti*, *Kalika*, *Amba*, *Waghoba*, *Chedoba*, *Mhasoba*, *Bahiri*, *Ganesh*, *Bhutnath*, *Ravalnath*, *Waghjai*, and others are among them. Many of them are mythical figures. A significant occasion in the lives of the rural masses when they can enjoy entertainment and culture is the yearly festival held once a year in commemoration of the village deity.

## 2.4 Introduction to town



**Figure 2** Location of the town

Rajapur (16.67°N 73.52°E) is an inland town in Rajapur Taluka in Ratnagiri District of Maharashtra State, India in South Konkan. The elevation of town is 74 m. The topography within 3 kms of Rajapur contains significant variations in elevation, with a maximum elevation change of 225 m and an average elevation above sea level of 227 m. The town is built on a slope rising from the water's edge situated at the head of a tidal creek about thirty miles southeast of Ratnagiri and about fifteen miles from the sea.



**Figure 3** Contour map of Rajapur town

The town is settled on rising slopes from Arjuna River and can be considered as an upland town in the inland part of Ratnagiri district. The town is a wide valley with gentle, concave side-slopes, in relatively soft formations such as sedimentary rocks.

In our diverse nation, there are numerous towns where different elements converge, including natural beauty, traditional knowledge, art, culture, religion, and politics. These towns serve as intersections where various distinct aspects come together, creating a rich tapestry of uniqueness. The town of Rajapur in the Ratnagiri district of Konkan is a beautiful confluence of knowledge, art, and culture. Surrounded by mountains on all four sides, Rajapur is the valley situated at the confluence of the 'Arjuna' river from Anuskura Ghats and the 'Godi' River from Kharvate Kodavali.

The study focuses on the temples, culture, traditions and spatial manifestation of the routes and places where they are performed. The town consists of various rituals attached to the temples and even daily life of the people making it culturally rich. However, certain areas within these settlements have been completely neglected due to evolving lifestyles, socioeconomic conditions, and changing attitudes towards inland regions. One of the ways to utilize these neglected parts, whether temporarily or permanently, is by deviating from traditional practices. Consequently, the small-town area's natural and man-made surroundings, which were once characterized by their distinct qualities, are gradually losing their essence as they are transformed to cater to contemporary needs and habits, giving rise to structures that do not align with the region's original character.

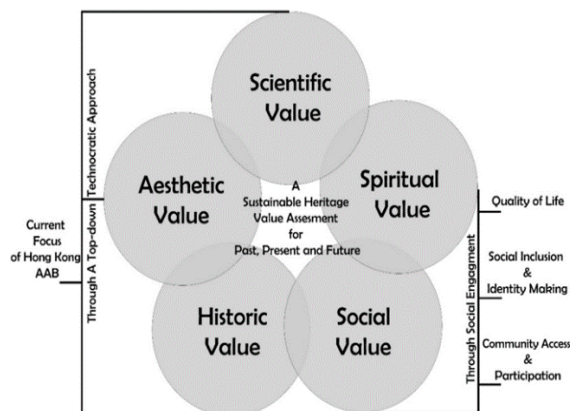
However, Rajapur consists rich history, cultural background, traditional housing, interesting geology, and other factors that make it an important town in South Konkan.

#### **2.4.1 History of the town**

Petroglyphs of Rajapur - estimated to be 12,000 years old

- The Petroglyph is an image drawn by removing part of a rock surface by incising, picking, carving, or abrading as a form of rock art.
- Petroglyphs are normally found across the world. They are often related to prehistoric people.
- The petroglyphs locally known as Katal Shilpa present in and around the Rajapur area are spread over the open spaces on the outskirts of villages. The rock carvings carved on the Laterite stone are what makes it unique.
- Due to the findings of petroglyphs, history of Rajapur is predicted to be 12,000 years old.

### 2.4.1 Cultural Identity



Source: MDBI

**Figure 4** Types of Cultural value from ICOMOS Burra charter

Cultural identity encompasses an individual's self-identification and group affiliation, which are reaffirmed over time. It encompasses various aspects such as behaviour, communication, psychology, and sociology, reflecting how deeply one embodies a specific culture. Values, meanings, traditions, and beliefs are integral components that shape one's connection to the external world. Cultural identity offers a shared framework of norms and historical experiences, serving as a stable reference for the entire group. External factors like appearance, ancestry, and behaviour impact how others perceive one's cultural group membership, including attire, speech, and festivities. Historical events, politics, interactions, and public discussions shape cultural identity. It is a dynamic, ever-changing concept that evolves throughout life, influenced by social contexts and one's understanding of oneself in relation to others.

The town of Rajapur has many rituals and festivals associated with the village deities, which are the core of all festivities and contribute significantly to the uniqueness of the town. The festivals and traditions include *Harinaam Saptah*, *Shimga Holi*, *Nishan Paalkhi*, *Garana*, *Dashavatar*, *Garhana*, *Vaadvai*, *Gavaldev*, *Gaavpalan* and many more.

#### 2.4.1.1 Culture of Rajapur

##### GRAMDEVATA

A *Gramdevata* (village deity) is the tutelary deity of a given locality in Hinduism, primarily worshipped in the villages. *Gramdevatas* are regarded to protect the inhabitants of their villages from bandits, epidemics, and natural disasters when propitiated, failing which they are believed to cause these afflictions. Rajapur's *Gramdevi* is Ninadevi.

##### KULDEVATA

They are observed as the protector of the family or lineage. They are the first worshipped deity of the family. *Kuldevata/devi* means the god(dess) of the 'Kul' or family lineage. These are usually temples where the family has been worshipping God for generations. There are 8 *Kuldevata* temples in Rajapur.

##### STHANDEVATA

*Sthandevata* is the local deity, a deity who protects the whole region. *Vetal*, *Ravalnath*, *Sati Devi* and *Nina Devi* are the local deities of Rajapur.

##### ISHTADEVATA

*Ishtadevata*, literally translates to 'the favored deity' whom we worship, and is the higher power, whom we connect with spiritually.





**Map 1** Map Showing various type of temples



**Figure 5** Marching the Bamboo in town



**Map 2** Route of Shimga procession  
*SHIMGOTSAV*

The Shimga festival in Rajapur is celebrated by the Konkani people in a special way, symbolizing the arrival of God at their own homes. Idols of deities are carried in palanquins to each household, where Holi is celebrated with fervour, praying for the well-being of families. A colourful procession accompanies the palanquins, with devotees seeking blessings and expressing their devotion. While urbanization has led to the disappearance of Shimga in cities, smaller towns like Rajapur keep the flame of Konkani culture alive, offering a unique and vibrant Holi celebration in India. The Festival of Holi or Shimga is celebrated in the Marathi month of *Falgun*. This is pre-Holi festival celebrated by people in Rajapur to bid farewell to winter and welcome spring.

The Kolis call this festival as Shimga. They make Holi from the wood and dung cakes brought from the Jungle. During Holi, the village deity's palanquin leaves. People come from all over the country to witness this palanquin festival which is famous in Rajapur.

It is believed in Konkani that Gods visit every house. The joy of the village deity coming to the house is something else.

#### **First five days of festival**

*Lok Utsav* (Public Festival)

*Kaarli* - Children take blessings from the Gramdevata

*Shipna* – Songs sung for Gramdevata

*Sthandevata Panchami*

*Gomu* - The men of koli tribe wear sarees and sing about their lifestyle reflecting to Lajjagauri

#### **Sixth day of Shimga Festival**

The people dig a tall bamboo in soil and it is surrounded with wood and dung cake. Before rowing, they make marching by worshipping this bamboo in the village.

They dance on the rhythm of *Dhol*, *Dholki* and *Tarpa*. On the peak of bamboo, they offer garland, Naivedya, Sugar garland, lemon tied in red cloth.





**Figure 8** Decorating the temple to welcome the Goddess



**Figure 7** Decorated palanquin with *Mukhavata* signifying the Goddess



**Figure 6** Villagers ready for the palanquin procession



**Figure 11** Procession from Gramdevata to Kuldevata in Gujarali



**Figure 10** Worshipping the Goddess



**Figure 9** Palanquin dance

### 3 Results

#### Value & Significance

##### a) Religious Value

*Gramdevata* and *Kuldevata* hold a great importance for the people of Rajapur. Local deities are believed to be the protectors of indigenous people in this town. *Mandir, Deula, Ghumati, Vas, Pataa, Sthana* and *Sthala* are the local names for the places of existence of deity or unknown power in this region. Konkan is traditionally called the land of Parashurama. Rajapur has a population of Daivadnya Brahmins which have a mythology associated with Parshuram making the town religiously rich. The deities worshiped by the Rajapurkars can be classified into five categories:

- 1) *Gramdevatas* (village deities),
- 2) *Sthandevatas* (local deities),
- 3) *Kuladevatas* (family deities),
- 4) *Ishtadevatas* (chosen deities), and
- 5) *Vastudevata* or *Gruhadevata* (house deities established during housewarming ceremonies).

Every precinct has a small temple which is domestic in nature and settlements are built along these temples.

#### VALUE

##### RELIGIOUS VALUE



*Sthandevata*



##### b) Cultural Value

The town has a number of rituals, festivals and traditional practices associated with the temples in every wadi, that has shaped the culture of the place. The festivals like, *Shimga Holi, Ganesh Chaturthi, Gomu, Lajjagauri, Kapadkhele* all are sacred to the people of Rajapur and have become the identity of the people.

The skill of making sustainable dwellings and lifestyle, also is a unique aspect of the town, the traditional knowledge of water management is a skill living within the communities.

##### CULTURAL VALUE



*Shimgotsav*



*Gomu*



*Harinam Saptah*

##### c) Significance

The significance of Rajapur is based on its capacity to offer unique traditional, urban, architectural and scenic whole. Its history is materialised in its diverse trading episodes, namely the Shilahars, the Bahamanis, the Marathas, the Portuguese and British each of them open for analysis, research, knowledge of the rich history of the crucial years lived in the region. From the architectural point of view the town maintains a great coherence with its surrounding. The town has the capacity to tell its story through architecture. From the scenic point of view, the aesthetic characteristics of the town are of great importance. Its relation to nature is a constant throughout the history. The dialogue of the town with the rivers and the hills are overwhelming fact for those who live in Rajapur or for the



*Chakarmani*. It is diverse and cohesive at the same time with its various cultures. The natural elements that facilitate urban life in the utilitarian sense, but also serve as recreational spaces of relaxation and amusement.

#### 4 Conclusion & Discussion

This is the type of heritage protection that is more attentive to the role of culture in promoting regional and ethnic differences, local knowledge and environmental management practices, fostering poverty alleviation, economic development and innovation.

It can increasingly influence the regional as well as international context, grounding the theoretical insight raised in the **goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015)** on empirical evidence and concrete indicators

The Rural Revitalisation Discourse:

**Small Settlements reflect** an articulated, fine-tuned **interaction** developed throughout time **between humankind and natural environment**.

Today, however, these territories are undergoing dramatic transformations. **Villages are experiencing out-migration** and marginalisation, loss of cultural and biological diversity, and their surrounding landscapes are witness to a revolution in farming, infrastructure and energy production to meet the needs of the world's population.

The critical role played by villages, small towns, and their surrounding environment is now becoming acknowledged as a complementary counterpart to growing cities, acting as extraction sites, reservoirs for food, fresh water, air, and as leisure spaces.

**UNESCO is promoting the 'Ruritage' programme**, a project funded by the European Community to create innovative, rural regeneration-based models for Cultural and Natural Heritage. The programme looks for experiences and indicators to consolidate **the role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development** and to contribute to economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental sustainability in rural areas (Ruritage 2019).

By identifying the issues, we can develop policies specific to the town which will also address the issues of nearby towns and villages to mend the gap.

The government can incentivize entrepreneurial innovation and provide funds to educated young people and entrepreneurs to return to their home villages to make innovative investments in the town.

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