

Waves of Devotion: Transforming Braj Bhumi's Kund Heritage Through Interactive Krishna Kathas

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First Author Name: Abhishek Sharma

Affiliation: Amity University Noida

Address: Department of Anthropology , Amity University.

Sector 125 , Noida(U.P) - 201313

E-mail Address: abhisheksharmaa.ak@gmail.com

Phone No.: +91-9068247648

Second Author Name: Ms.Deepshikha Sinha

Affiliation : National Institute of Urban Affairs

Address : NIUA , Indian Habitat Centre , Lodhi Road , New Delhi

E-mail Address: deepshikha@niua.org

Co-Author: Dr.Roumi Deb

Affiliation: Amity University Noida

Address: Department of Anthropology , Amity University.

Sector 125 , Noida(U.P) - 201313

E-mail Address: rdev@amity.edu

Waves of Devotion: Transforming Braj Bhumi's Kund Heritage Through Interactive Krishna Katha

Abhishek Sharma¹ , Deepshikha Sinha² , Dr. Roumi Deb³

Amity University Noida , National Institute of Urban Affairs

abhisheksharmaa.ak@gmail.com , deepshikha@niua.org , rdev@amity.edu

Abstract :

This study aims to connect people with the cultural heritage of Braj Bhumi by probing the revival of the region's kund heritage through the incorporation of Krishna legends. A variety of strategies are used in the study to accomplish its goals. In the first place, it looks into how people use the kund and their patterns of activity by using qualitative techniques including focus groups, pre-tested interview schedules, visual documentation from temple priests, local people ,tourist with observations. The research also creates a thorough transformation plan that prioritizes bringing back their historical value in order to draw in more tourists. Preserving architectural features, boosting cultural involvement through interactive Krishna Kathas, and increasing water quality are important components. The suggested plan places a strong emphasis on ecological sustainability and community involvement, emphasizing the function that animals, plants, and water management play in preserving the kund ecosystems. The initiative uses cutting-edge technology, such as Virtual Reality (VR) experiences, to inform and interest guests about the rich history and legends connected to each kund. The ultimate goal of this project is to maintain Braj Bhumi's holy ponds as thriving hubs for intercultural dialogue, environmental preservation, and spiritual devotion for upcoming generations.

Keywords : Culture , Heritage , Krishna , Conservation

I. Introduction

A *Kund* can be defined as a reservoir or a small artificial lake (traditional water harvesting system) often used for storing water, primarily rainwater. The term "*kund*" originates from Sanskrit, meaning a water reservoir or tank. Kunds can vary widely in size, from small ponds to larger reservoirs, and they can be found across different landscapes, from urban areas to rural villages and remote countryside. Based on their history and intended use, kunds come in a variety of forms. ***Natural Kunds***, are formed by natural processes such as geological formations, depressions in the land, or natural springs that collect water over time. ***Artificial Kunds***, are intentionally constructed by humans to collect rainwater or store water diverted from rivers or streams. They often serve as community water reservoirs. (Bhattacharya, 2015)

In Indian history, the use of kund extends back thousands of years. There is evidence of advanced water management systems from ancient societies like the Indus Valley Civilization (2600–1900 BCE), which had tanks and reservoirs and probably had uses similar to those of current kunds. In addition to providing drinking water and facilitating irrigation, these prehistoric buildings were ritualistic and symbolic in the people's socio-religious lives. (Jain, 2022) During the Vedic period (ca. 1500–500 BCE), water bodies were highly esteemed as symbols of purity and the origin of life. Kunds were frequently linked to ceremonies that included sacrifices and ablutions (religious cleansing) intended to please gods and ensure the prosperity and well-being of communities. The basis for Kunds' continuing prominence in Indian culture was established by this relationship with spirituality and communal well-being. (Singh, 2021)

India has a variety of traditional water harvesting systems that differ from state to state. *Baoli*, which are carved step wells with motifs, archways, and apartments on the sides, used for social gatherings and utilitarian purposes, while others served as rest stops for travelers and traders. *Baolis* alongside agricultural fields offer water for crops through small channels. commonly found in Delhi, Rajasthan and Gujarat. *Jhalaras* are rectangular stepwells with tiered stairs on 3-4 sides. In Rajasthan and Gujarat, communities collect subsurface seepage from reservoirs or lakes to utilize for residential, religious, or ceremonial purposes. Whereas *Bawaris* are a different sort of stepwell that predates *Jhalaras*. Rainfall in the region is channeled to man-made tanks via canals located on the fringes of cities. The water refilled the groundwater and aquifers below it. To prevent water loss due to evaporation, the wells were deepened and narrowed through layered steps. Other systems like *Talabs*, *Khadins* or *Dhora*, *Virdas*, *Eris*, *Madakas*, *Pemghara*, *Kattas*, *Jackwells*, etc. of water harvesting are available to see in India with different structure and different purpose. But Kunds are much prominent and easily seen in India with different names and structure. (Hussain, 2014)

Braj Bhumi, popularly known as Lord Krishna's territory, encompasses an area of 4000 square kilometers. considered as sacred region related with Lord Krishna's childhood and early life. It covers area of Uttar Pradesh (Mathura, Vrindavan, Govardhan, and Barsana), Rajasthan (Deeg, Kaman, Bhojanthali), and Haryana (Hodal). The location is extremely significant in Hindu mythology and religious history because of its close link with Lord Krishna's fun and holy acts, called '*leelas*'. In the holy texts of Krishna's life, the relationship of Krishna activities, with their friends-family around Kunds of Braj, are fully documented. (Tater, 2023)

श्री राधाकुण्ड अष्टकम्

वृषभदनुजनाशात् नर्मधर्मोक्तिरङ्गैः,
निखिलनिजतनूभिर्यत्स्वहस्तेन पूर्णम् ।

प्रकटितमपि वृन्दारण्यराजा प्रमोदैः,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ १॥

व्रजभुवि मुरशत्रोः प्रेयसीनां निकामैः,

असुलभमपि तूर्णं प्रेमकल्पद्रुमं तम् ।

जनयति हृदि भूमौ स्नातुरुच्चैः प्रियं यत्,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ २॥

अघरिपुरपि यत्नादत्र देव्याः प्रसाद-
प्रसरकृतकटाक्षप्राप्तिकामः प्रकामम् ।

अनुसरति यदुच्चैः स्नानसेवानुबन्धैः,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ३॥

व्रजभुवनसुधांशोः प्रेमभूमिर्निकामं,
व्रजमधुरकिशोरीमौलिरत्नप्रियेव ।

परिचितमपि नाम्ना यच्च तेनैव तस्याः,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ४॥

अपि जन इह कश्चिद्यस्य सेवाप्रसादैः,
प्रणयसुरलता स्यात्तस्य गोष्ठेन्द्रसूनोः ।

सपदि किल मदीशा दास्यपुष्पप्रशस्या,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ५॥

ततमधुरनिकुञ्जाः क्लृप्तनामान उच्चैः,
निजपरिजनवर्गैः संविभज्याश्रितास्तैः ।

मधुकररुतरम्या यस्य राजन्ति काम्याः,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ६॥

ततभुवि वरवेद्यं यस्य नर्मातिहृद्यं,
मधुरमधुरवार्ता गोष्ठचन्द्रस्य भङ्ग्या ।

प्रथयितुमित ईशप्राणसख्यालिभिः सा,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ७॥

अनुदिनमतिरङ्गैः प्रेममतालिसङ्घैः,
वरसरसिजगन्धैः हारिवारिप्रपूर्णैः ।

विहरत इह यस्मिन् दम्पती तौ प्रमत्तौ,
तदतिसुरभि राधाकुण्डमेवाश्रयो मे ॥ ८॥

। इति राधाकुण्डाष्टकं समाप्तम् ।

Kunds are not simply sources of water, but also places of spiritual and cultural significance. Kunds have a profound emotional and religious significance for the Braj people. People are frequently associated with traditions and stories about Krishna's life, during which he engaged in playful activities with his friends and accomplished amazing miracles. Kunds in Govardhan, such as Radha Kund and Shyam Kund, are said to be forever connected to Lord Krishna and Radha's eternal love, making it centers of devotion and pilgrimage for locals who come to perform rituals and seek spiritual peace of mind. According to 2010 Indian Water Portal investigation, the Braj Bhumi region comprises around 108 kunds of varying sizes and architectures. Each kund has its unique significance, as it is frequently linked to Hindu mythological narratives and folklore. (Prasad, 2015)

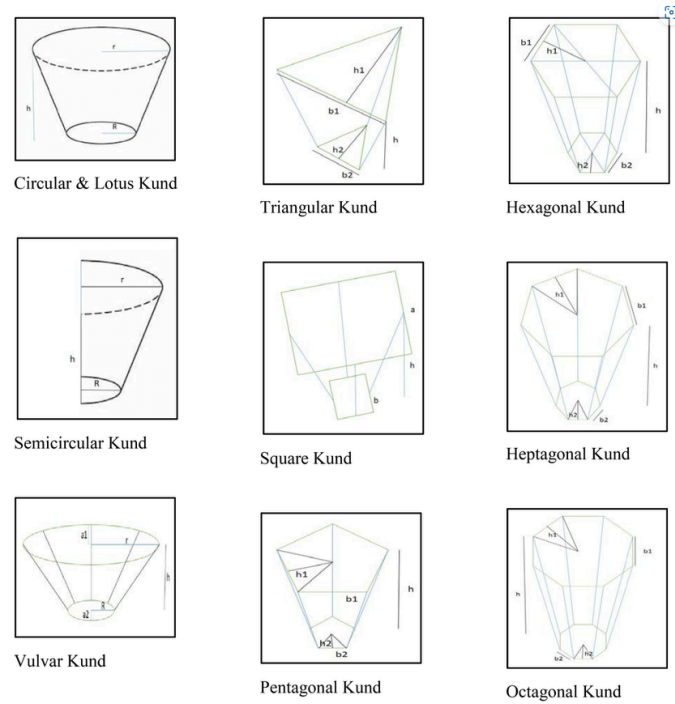


Figure 1: Different shapes of Kunds with their bottom surface.

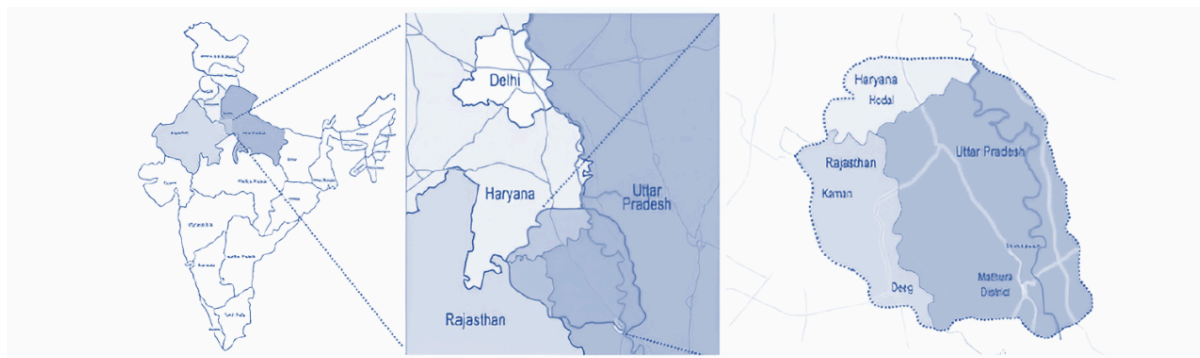
The Braj people's lives are center around these kunds, which serve as gathering places for religious rites, festivals, and communal gatherings. The water from these kunds is regarded as pure and spiritually healing, promoting frequent visits for ceremonial baths and prayers. These kunds promote social cohesiveness by serving as gathering places for villages and townspeople to exchange news, tell stories, and establish community bonds.(Anand, 1992) Some of the most famous kunds of Braj Bhoomi are:-

Kund Name	Location	State
Radha Kund	Govardhan	Uttar Pradesh
Shyama Kund	Govardhan	
Mansarovar	Govardhan	
Prem Kund	Barsana	
Priya Kund	Barsana	
Deh Kund	Barsana	
Yashoda Kund	Nandgaon	
Krishna Kund	Nandgaon	
Dohini Kund	Nandgaon	
Gaya Kund	Kaman	Rajasthan
Vimal Kund	Kaman	
Tapt Kund	Adibadrinath Bilond	
Shri Kund	Kaman	
Gauri Kund	Adikedarnath Bilond	

A.Study Area

India's Braj area is renowned for having a rich natural and cultural history that is ingrained in its holy customs. The holy River Ganges has a significant tributary named Yamuna, which is close to Braj. It is surrounded by an esoteric perimeter that was previously known as "84 Kos" (about 252 km), which includes the districts of Mathura in Uttar Pradesh, Bharatpur in Rajasthan, and Hodal in Palwal District in Haryana. The area has several sacred biological places, including rivers, woods,

kunds, groves, hills, and temples. These locations are significant from both a cultural and spiritual perspective and as a storehouse for traditional knowledge systems. Both preserving the region's distinctive ecological diversity and forming its cultural character have been greatly aided by these locations.



II. Research Methodology

The research methodology employs qualitative research techniques to investigate and propose strategies for enhancing the cultural heritage of Braj Bhumi's Kund. Primary data collection utilized pre-tested interview schedules, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and observational methods to gather insights from stakeholders including temple priests, local residents, and visitors. These methods were chosen to understand activity patterns, usability of the kund premises, and perceptions of historical significance. The artful and symbolic elements of the kunds are provided by visual data capture. In order to provide a thorough grasp of community viewpoints and cultural narratives, purposeful sampling ensured representation among a variety of stakeholder groups. The study of observational data, FGD notes, interview transcripts, and visual materials was done using qualitative data analysis techniques such as thematic analysis. The result of this process is a meticulously designed that uses interactive Krishna Kathas to draw more tourists to Braj Bhumi's Kunds, reawaken interest in them, and encourage long-term cultural involvement via these hallowed locations. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

III. Result Analysis

The data analyzed in this research paper was collected from the 16 kunds of Braj Bhumi, located in Rajasthan (Kaman, Deeg) and Uttar Pradesh (Barsana, Nandgaon) and aims to understand the perception, understanding, and experience of the priests of temples, residents of Braj, and tourist. This diverse geographic sampling ensured a comprehensive study of kund activity patterns and usability across different cultural contexts within Braj Bhumi.

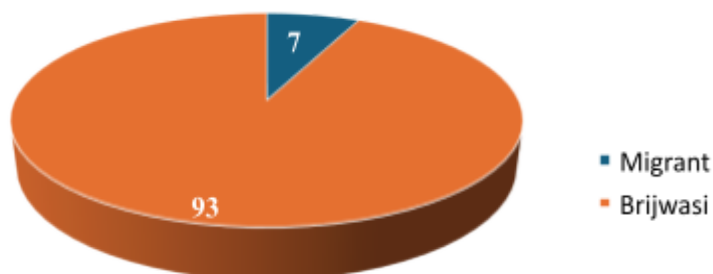
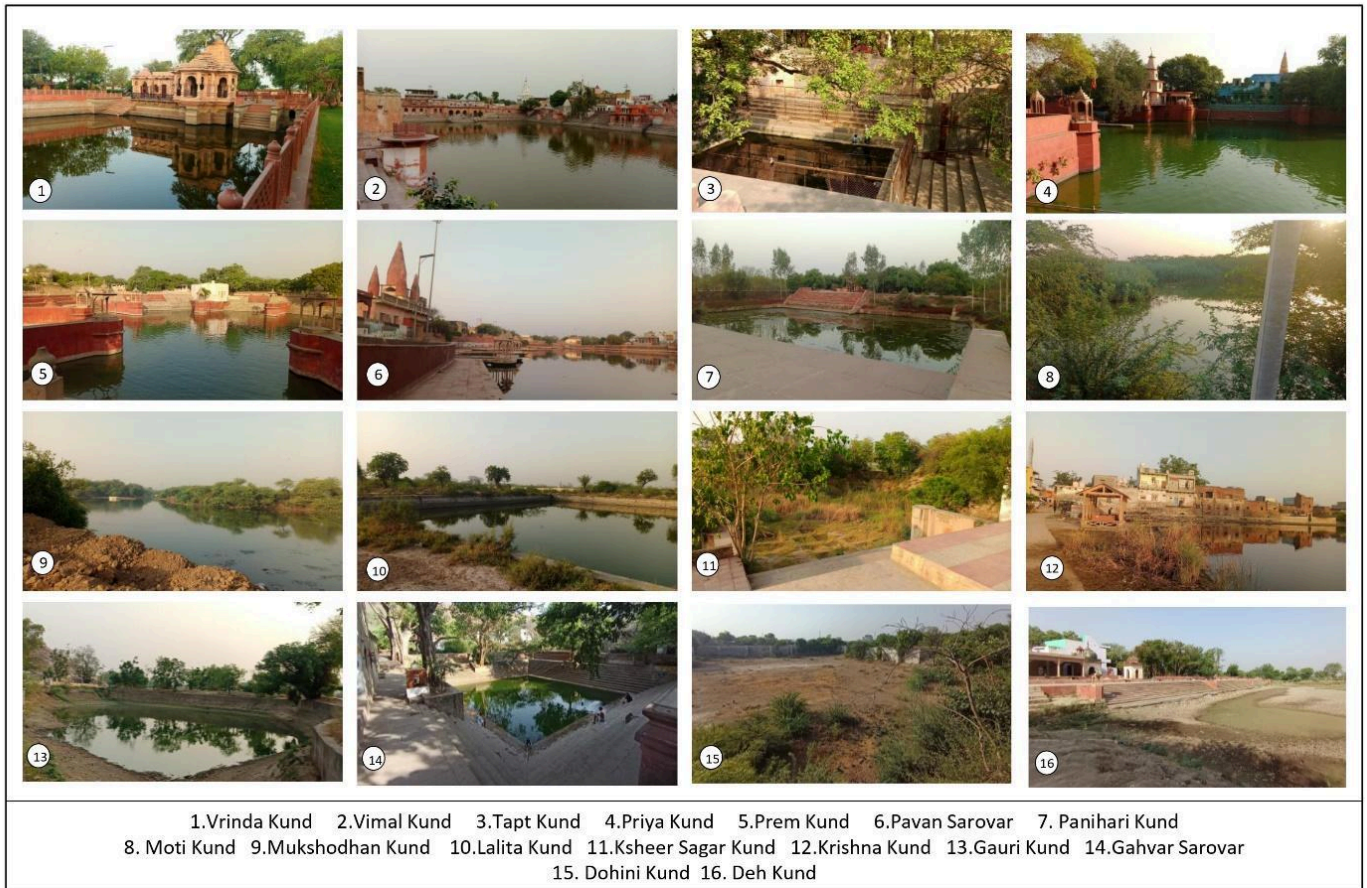


Figure 1. describes about the residents of Braj.

93% of the population residing in the Braj Bhumi region, as per the collected data, are Brijwasi, with the other individuals being migrants from other Indian states such as Uttarakhand and Bihar, who came for work and developed a strong bond with Lord Krishna.



The 16 kunds that are dispersed throughout Uttar Pradesh (Barasana, Nandgaon) and Rajasthan (Kaman, Deeg) are essential to the cultural and theological fabric of Braj Bhumi and are closely associated with the stories of Lord Krishna. These rainwater-fed reservoirs have a rich historical background as holy locations where devotees perform rituals and journeys in order to obtain blessings from Krishna and Radha. Many of these kunds, despite their cultural significance, are threatened by significant ecological issues that affect both their survival and the practices that connect them.

6 of the 16 kunds investigated were determined to be ecologically fragile, and 2 of the kunds were found to be experiencing drought. The local communities and the region's tourism potential have been impacted by these difficulties, which have led to the decline of their heritage value. The declining quality of the water in several kunds, shown by the presence of fungal growth on the stairs, dead fish, greenish water, and an unpleasant smell, presents serious health hazards to those taking part in ceremonies and pilgrimages. These problems endanger the kunds' status as hubs of cultural and spiritual traditions in addition to lessening their aesthetic attractiveness.



These kunds have historically played a crucial role in the Braj Bhumi Parikrama, a holy circumambulation pilgrimage that fosters a close relationship between devotees and the divine by immersing them in the blessings and legends of Krishna. The number of tourists and pilgrims usually soars during the Adhik Mas period, a unique month

in the Hindu calendar said to be auspicious for religious activity. This influx, which brings devotees from far and wide to bath in the purifying waters and seek spiritual fulfillment, is essential to the local economic and cultural vibrancy.

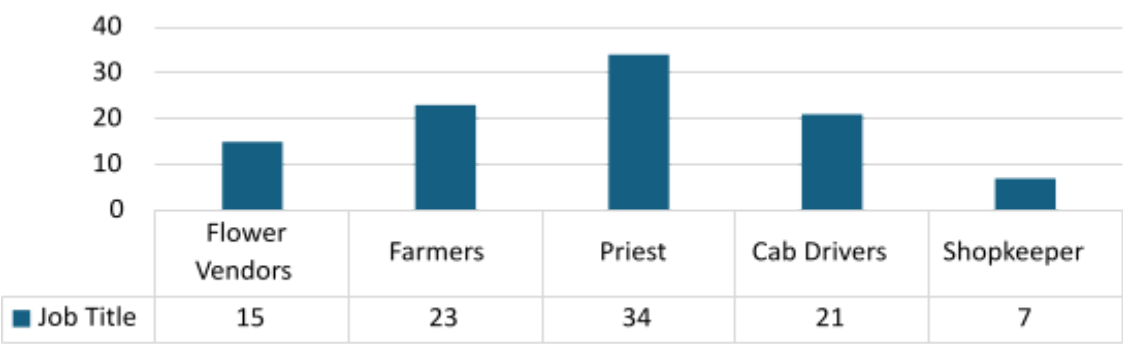


Figure 2. describes about the participants who work in the Braj Bhumi.

People are more interested in earning money for daily needs. It became evident during the data collection and interview process that the people of Braj are content with the daily income they receive and are happy to be living with Krishna.

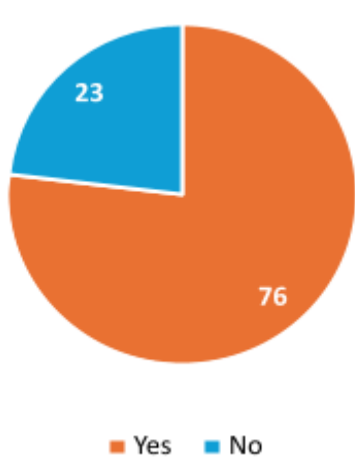


Figure 3. highlights the participant who bath in Kund on festivals

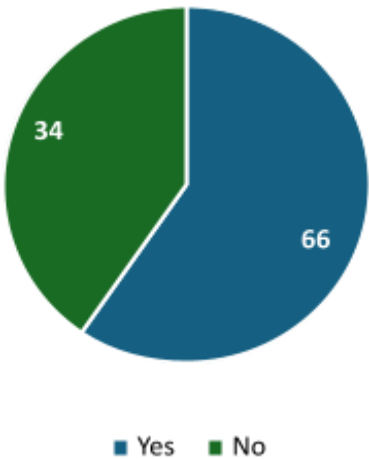
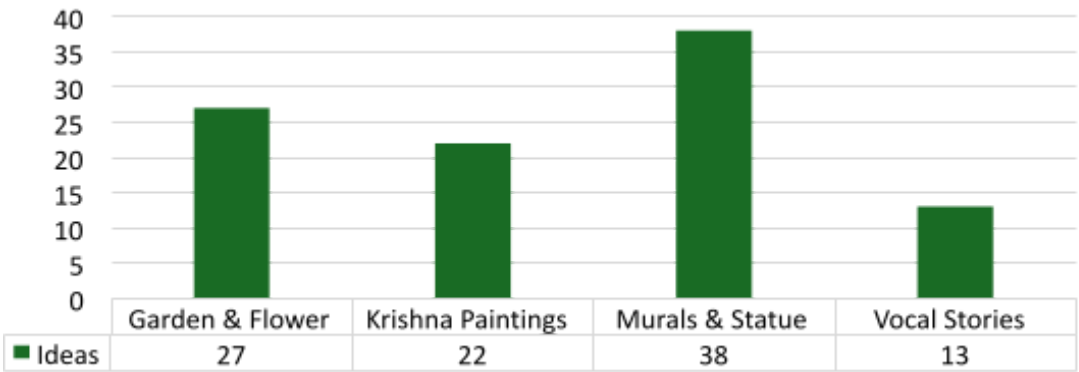


Figure 4. highlights the usage of Kund water for domestic purpose.

The kund's green color may be due to algae, yet people came there for baths during festivals and to use the water for household



purposes because of a religious belief.

Figure 5. describes the ideas given by participants to make Kund more attractive.

The people of Braj also have some ideas and plans for the reconstruction of Kunds and its surrounding territories. They desire an increase in visitors and public attractions. In order to support the local economy through tourism, they aim to popularize their culture and the stories of Lord Krishna.

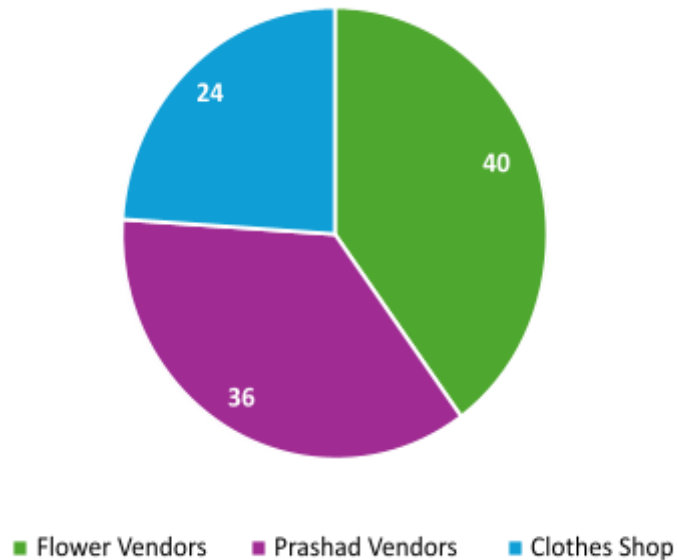


Figure 6. describes the economic facilities needed after redevelopment for tourists.

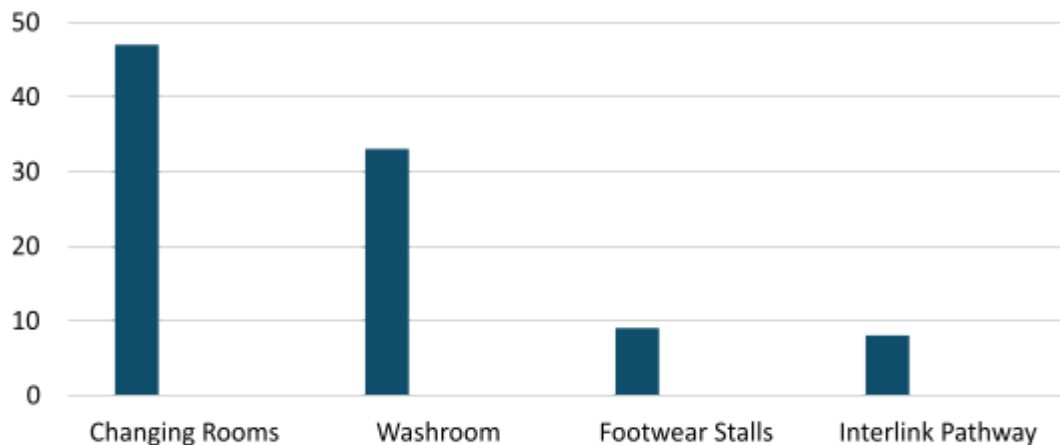


Figure 7. describes about the essential for the tourist and locals in the premises of Kund.

Focus Group Discussion: -

- Priests

“Krishna , hamesha se hi hamare priye rahe hai ; vo apne bhakto ki hamesha se hi sunte aaye hai , haan kabhi bhi essa nahi hua ki kisi ne bhi unse kuch manga ho or vo pura na hua ho , yeh kund krishna ke samay se hi yha par stith hai ; Krishna hamesha Braj me idher se udher apne gyaalo ke saath jaya krte the , jaha vo gopiyo ke saath Rasleela kiya krte the or apne

dosto ke saath khela krte the , Braj me Har kund ka ek rahsya hae , har kund ka apna ek itihaas hai ; Radha Shyam kund Govardhan me Radha or Krishna ke prem ke lia jaana jata hai , Kha jata hai Krishna or Radha Aksar apna samay yahi vyatit kiya krte the or Krishna apni bansuri se pure Govardhan ko Madmohit kr diya krte the , iss kund ka agar vikas kiya bhi jata hai , to ham sarkar se yahi maang karenge ki logo ki Aastha ke saath kuch bhi khilvaad nahi hona chahiye , iss kund pe iss taareeke se vikas kiya jaaye taki iski pavitrata kisi bhi stithi me bhang na ho , iss kund ki phehnchaan nhi jaani chahiye vikas ke saath , kyuki iss kund pe bahut se log jeev jantu bhi nirbhar hae , jo ki krishna ke saath saath iss jagah ke Vayu Mandal se bhi judde hue hae!”

• Tourists :-

“ Ham bahot samay se yha aa rahe hae , yeh jagah aaj bhi wesi hi hai jesi aaj se 10 saal pehli thi , iss jagah ki hawa me alag si hi mehak he , jo ki hame iske kareeb aur khich laati hai , pehle iss kund ke pass bahut saari gaye bhes bhi dikha krti thi , jo ki ab nahi dikhti , logo ko krishna ke baare me to pta hae lekin unse juddi hui chizo ke baare me abhi bhi unhe itna gyaan nahi hai , hamari sanskriti kahi na kahi inn sab me chupi hui hae , jisko hamare bacho ko batane ki bahot jarurt hai kyuki vakt ke saath saath inhe bhi hamare itihaas , hamari Aastha ke baare me pta hona chahiye , jo ki kahi na kahi vilupt hoti jaa rahi hae . Aaj bhi yeh jagah utni hi Pavitra hae , subh ke vakt vahi chidiyo ki aawaz aana or thandi or saaf hawa mehsus hona.” “logo ko krishna ki inn jagaho ke baare me jagruk krna bhot jaruri hae , taaki unhe or bhi bhot kuch pta chal sake krishna or unki kahaniyo se Rahasya.”

IV. Recommendation

A comprehensive approach centered on improving water quality, ecological sustainability, community participation, cultural enhancement, and technological integration is necessary to properly protect and re-establish people's connection with the history of Braj Bhumi's kunds.

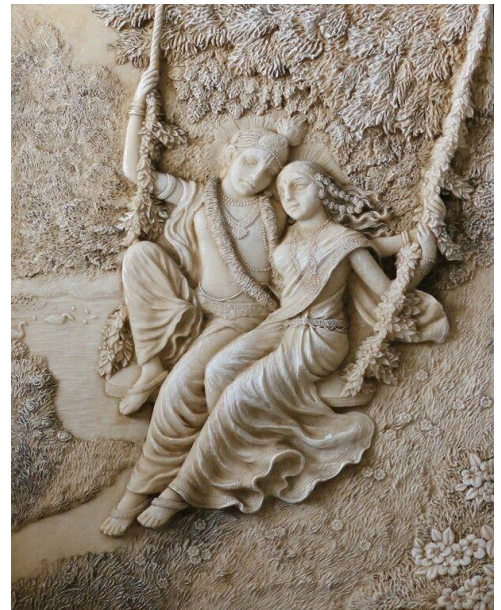
Water quality is the first and most important issue to address. Cleaner water can be achieved by adding fish and aquatic plants that eat less algae and fungus naturally. Using this method helps maintain the environment within the kunds while also improving their visual attractiveness. For ecological balance, it is also imperative to incorporate plants within the kund premises. The sustainability of the kunds natural ecosystem is ensured by planting trees and other vegetation, which also serves to regulate water levels, reduce evaporation, and avoid soil erosion.

The kund surroundings must be transformed into multipurpose areas in order to promote a sense of community ownership and involvement. The creation of workout areas, tree-lined walking paths with benches, and water tanks for drinking water are some of the features that encourage locals to incorporate kund visits into their everyday lives. Creating music-focused areas for Krishna bhajans and satsang zones where spiritual gatherings can take place further amplifies the kund surroundings' positive energy, enabling a more profound relationship with Krishna and promoting communal harmony. The historical integrity of the kunds can be preserved while still being economically feasible by integrating the pre-existing structures into the design. Visitors' cultural experience is enhanced and education is provided by the murals on the walls of the kunds, which show legends of Lord Krishna related to each kund.

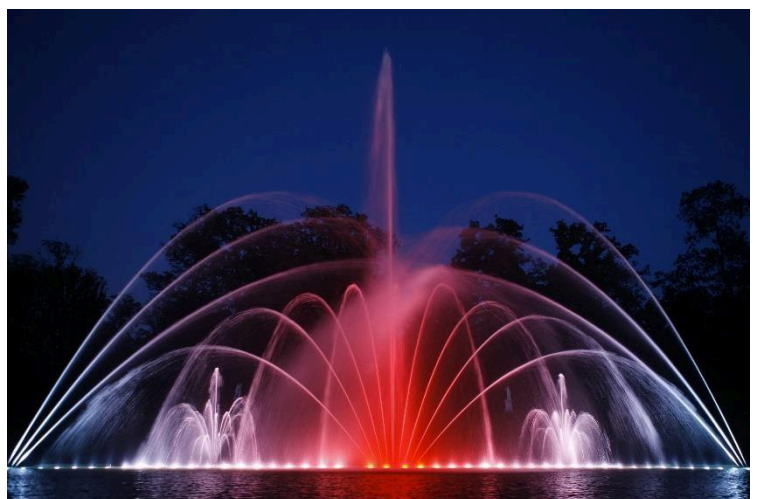
A contemporary method to apprise visitors about the historical significance of the kunds is to incorporate technology, such as Virtual Reality (VR) experiences, into the visitor engagement plan. By taking tourists on a virtual reality tour, they can gain a deeper knowledge and appreciation of how the kunds were utilized and cherished in ancient times. Every kund in Braj Bhumi possesses a distinct tale and importance connected to the folklore of Lord Krishna. An increased level of passion and a stronger sense of connection to each place can be achieved by using these narratives to customize and improve visitor experiences. Visitors are invited to explore and enjoy the diversity within Braj Bhumi's sacred legacy by showcasing the unique historical and cultural features of each kund.

Structural Plan to develop the Kund also includes: -

1. Murals on Walls: - Kunds (reservoir) of Braj Bhumi can be made more beautiful and traditional by adding paintings on the walls. Scenes from Hindu mythology may be drawn on the walls, especially those involving Lord Krishna, who is revered in Braj Bhumi. The beautiful paintings on the walls depict scenes from her life such as her childhood adventures (Bal Leela), dancing with the gopis (Ras Leela) and other legends of the Bhagavan Purana. This enhances the beauty of the area and strengthens the connection between visitors and the spiritual and cultural history of the area. The most boring walls can be transformed into beautiful paintings with beautiful paintings. Artists can capture the viewer's attention and create a sense of curiosity and admiration with beautiful colors, beautiful designs, and beautiful emotions. Murals may also depict historical events, important places and traditions specific to Braj Bhumi. This allows visitors to learn about the region's past while enjoying the beauty of the artworks, while also helping to preserve and showcase the region's rich history and culture. Involving local artists and the community in the art-making process increases residents' interest and creativity. It also provides artists with the opportunity to showcase their skills and enhance the beauty of their surroundings. Attractive paintings can attract tourists and thus promote tourism in the area. Kunds with paintings is an important place in Braj Bhumi because many tourists love to go to the place where there is a unique cultural experience and beautiful beauty. Additionally, murals can be designed with natural motifs such as trees, animals and landscapes to blend in with the kund's surroundings. By harmoniously integrating environment and art, the entire beauty appeal of the area is enhanced.



2. Water Fountain Shows with Krishna Stories :- The beauty and culture of Braj Bhumi Kund can be enhanced by adding water fountains depicting the legend of Krishna. Visitors can immerse themselves in the story of Lord Krishna using a variety of experiences such as sound, light and water. The animated film offers a story and interactive content that resonates with audiences of all ages due to its positive nature. Braj Bhumi, which is about the life and story of Lord Krishna, is very important in terms of culture and religion in Hinduism. This cultural heritage can be



passed on and preserved to future generations through fountains that tell the story of Krishna. The combination of light, music and water jets creates an appeal, allowing fountains to add interest to the design. Bringing together famous moments from Krishna's life, such as his childhood adventures, his battles with demons, or his love in heaven, will captivate the audience and leave an unforgettable impression. Fountain displays can also be illuminated by illuminating the life of Krishna. Deep legends and lessons about Lord Krishna. By presenting the story, the audience can better understand the moral lessons and spiritual significance these stories contain. A lavish theater telling stories about Krishna can attract pilgrims and tourists from all over the world. The local economy will therefore benefit from greater tourism revenue and local expansion and infrastructure support. For believers in Hindu gods, watching the heavenly pastimes of Lord Krishna depicted in lavish fountains can be a very spiritual experience. It can be a travel and engagement tool that gives followers a visual perspective and encourages them to connect with their beliefs. The creation and regular maintenance of water fountains can promote a sense of pride and participation in the community. By working together, local experts, artists, and actors can bring Krishna's story to life, strengthen community connections, and inspire cultural understanding.



3. Krishna Statues as Symbols:- Krishna is a central figure in Hindu mythology, especially in the Braj region where he spent his childhood and performed various divine activities. By installing statues of Krishna playing, you're honoring this cultural heritage and reinforcing the spiritual significance of the Kunds. Statues of Krishna playing, whether it's him with his flute, engaging in playful antics with his friends, or enacting his various leelas (divine plays), can add a visually appealing element to the surroundings. The graceful postures, flowing garments, and serene expressions of Krishna can serve as focal points, drawing visitors' attention and enhancing the overall beauty of the area. These statues can serve as excellent photo-capturing spots. Visitors, both locals and tourists, will likely be drawn to take pictures with these statues, capturing not just the physical beauty of the sculptures but also the spiritual essence they embody. This can contribute to the promotion of the Kunds as a tourist destination, attracting more visitors and raising awareness about the cultural and religious significance of the area. For devotees and spiritual seekers, encountering statues of Krishna playing can evoke a sense of connection

with the divine. It can provide them with a serene and contemplative space for meditation, prayer, or simply quiet reflection. The presence of these statues can deepen the spiritual experience of visitors, fostering a sense of peace, joy, and reverence. Alongside their aesthetic and spiritual significance, these statues can also serve an educational purpose. They can be accompanied by informational plaques or signage explaining the significance of the depicted scenes from Krishna's life and teachings. This adds depth to visitors' understanding of Hindu mythology and the cultural heritage of Braj Bhumi. The installation of these statues can involve local artisans, sculptors, and craftsmen, thereby fostering community engagement and supporting local craftsmanship. It can also serve as a platform for showcasing traditional art forms and preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

V. Conclusion

This research demonstrates a comprehensive approach to preserve the Kund water bodies while simultaneously cultivating a deep relationship between the current generation, the next generation, and the rich cultural heritage of Braj Bhumi. The project acknowledges the crucial role that trees and wildlife, such as birds and monkeys, play in protecting these holy sites, going beyond the immediate focus on water quality and human involvement. The whole kund ecosystem's sustainability is guaranteed by this all-encompassing strategy. The project also helps to recharge aquifers and groundwater levels by

safeguarding the kunds' water bodies, which supports larger environmental conservation initiatives. The water, flora, animal, and human communities that make up the kund ecosystem are all interrelated and work in a cyclical loop to preserve ecological equilibrium. In order to provide a complete approach to heritage preservation and environmental stewardship, it is important to strengthen these links through community involvement, cultural events such as Krishna Kathas, and technology advances.

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DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

I, Abhishek Sharma, declare that I have no known conflicts of interest associated with this publication . I was selected for this competition and received funding amounting to ₹50,000 for my project titled "Waves of Devotion: Transforming Braj Bhumi's Kund Heritage through Interactive Krishna Kathas" by the National Institute of Urban Affairs and National Mission of Clean Ganga.

I confirm that the funding provided by the National Mission of Clean Ganga was solely for the purpose of supporting my academic research and did not involve any personal, financial, or professional interests that could potentially influence the outcomes or perceptions related to my thesis work.

I confirm that the manuscript has been read and approved by all named authors and that there are no other persons who satisfied the criteria for authorship but are not listed. I further confirm that the order of authors listed in the manuscript has been approved by all of us.

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