

Heritage Information

Unique Id:

BGD-55.27.2023.00050

Section-1: Identification of the element

Heritage Location

Division

Rangpur

District

Dinajpur

Upazila

Details Address

Geolocation(Latitude)

Geolocation(Longitude)

Community Category

Religious

Community

Hindu

Name of the Heritage, (as used by the community or group concerned)

Ras Mela of Kantajir Mandir

Short title of the Heritage, (preferably within 200 words)

'Ras Mela' or 'Ras Festival' of Kantajir Temple, falling in Domain 3 - Social practices, rituals and festive events.

Concerned Community(ies)/Group(s), (who recognize the element as part of their cultural heritage)

Physical location(s) of the element/how often it is practiced

The 'Ras Mela' is a yearly festival at the Kantajir Temple of Kantanagar, Dinajpur, held in the Bengali month of 'Kartik'.

Short description of the Heritage, (preferably within 350 words)

Kantanagar Temple, commonly known as Kantajir Mandir or Kantajew Temple at Kantanagar, is an 18th century Hindu temple. It is about 12 miles north of Dinajpur town, and about a mile west of Dinajpur- Tetulia highway across the Dhepa River. It has gained eminence as an outstanding monument in Bengal for its fabulous terracotta embellishment. This nava-ratna or 'nine spired' Hindu temple, now stripped off its original nine spires atop its corners during the devastating earthquake of 1897, exhibits the exuberance of terracotta art at its best in Bangladesh. Maharaja Prannath of Dinajpur started its construction in 1622 and it was finished by his son Maharaja Ramnath in 1752. Every year the temple hosts

Rashmela, on the occasion of Kathik Purnima/Rash Purnima (usually happens at the end of November). Fifteen days before the festival starts, temple Gods Radha and Krishna travel to Dinajpur Rajbari which is considered Radha's home, through a boat journey on Punarbhava River. After 15 days, they return to Kantajait Mandir on a Palki, or palanquin. Then they perform a chakra around the temple (circumambulation) and take their place and thus the 1 month long Rash Mela or Festival starts.

☐ Domains of the Heritage (applicable fields)

- ☐ Oral Traditions and Expressions
- ☒ Performing Arts
- ☒ Social Customs and Traditions
- ☐ Knowledge and Practices related to Nature and Universe
- ☒ Traditional Craftsmanship
- ☐ Food

☐ Section-2: Characteristics of the element

☐ Practitioners(s)/performer(s) directly involved in the representation or practice of the Heritage (including roles, name, age, gender, social status, and/or professional category etc.)

Mostly the Hindu community of Dinajpur. The rituals are performed on the night of the full moon in accordance with a tradition that dates back 500 years, and is connected with the Rajas of Dinajpur. The festival is observed by people from all walks of life. Thousands of devotees from India, Nepal, as well as across Bangladesh. Magura, Mymensingh and Patuakhali, Nilphamari and Bhola pay their homage. Many spend the festival night around the temple area, believing that such rituals can promote the welfare of society. During this period, the temple authorities provide food and entertainment. The latter includes ritual songs and Radha-Krishna dances, much to the delight of the pilgrims and in keeping with traditional temple hospitality.

☐ Other tradition bearers (individuals/groups and their roles))

Besides the clergy of the Temple, the Festival draws performers, musicians, local craftspeople and local cuisine.

☐ Language(s), register(s), speech level(s) involved

Language used during the performances at the Festival is Bangla.

☐ Associated tangible elements used (if any)

The 300 years old terracotta temple, the Kantajir Mandir, is the locale for this Festival.

☐ How are women and people of other genders associated with this Heritage?

Women do participate in 'naamkirtan' and offer prayers. Only Brahmin men can worship the Gods, Kirtan or Kirtana is a form of worship, the Vaishnavas introduced this genre of Bangla songs to describe the qualities of the deities and their deeds. It is a call-and-response style theatrical folk song to express adoring devotion to a deity. Kirtan is also referred as sankirtan as it is a collective performance. With 64 rasas or moods, Kirtan belongs to the classical stream. One of the notable feature of kirtan is that it uses the entire scale. Kirtan is of two kinds : Namkirtan or Namsangkirtan and Lilakirtan or Rasakirtan. The name of Hari or Vishnu is repeated in Namkirtan.

☐ Division of labour during the practice of this Heritage

Brahmin men can worship the Gods. But anyone can offer prayers. In the festival there are local handicrafts and sweet shops can be observed

☐ Elements to which other customary practices or practices may be connected or accessed in any respect of the heritage (if any)

Though Brahmin men can perform the worship or puja of the deities, around which the festival is organised, women participate by performing devotional songs and also by preparing food for all devotees.

☐ Modes of transmission to others in the community

The festival is 500 years old and continues to attract devotees not just from all over Bangladesh, but also from neighbouring countries.

□ Organizations concerned (non-governmental organizations and others)

Local Government and the Priests, who are tradition bearers of the Temple; the festival is also supported by The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), known colloquially as the Hare Krishna movement or Hare Krishnas, is a Gaudiya Vaishnava Hindu religious organisation.

□ Section-3: State of the element (viability)

□ Threats to the enactment

□ Enactment Threats Description

There are concerns regarding the security. A bomb blast happened in 2015. A Festival organised by a Hindu Temple in the midst of a Muslim majority nation is always a security hazard and needs the protection of the local government.

□ Threats to the transmission (if any)

.Religious discord sometimes poses a threat. <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/bomb-blasts-kantaji-temple-183034>

□ Threat to associated tangible elements and resources (if any)

.There is need to conserve the unique terracotta panels of the Kantajir Temple, around which the Rash Festivities take place.

□ Viability of associated intangible elements (if any)

A circus sits near the festival which is not respectful to the local culture and the tradition, commercialising a holy festival.

□ Have been taken any safeguarding measures to preserve this Heritage practices? (if any)

Government is giving assurance and encouraging the festival

□ Section-4: Data gathering/documentation, Consent and preparation of inventory entries

□ Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

They are okay with it

□ Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any)

None

□ Section-5: Resource Person

□ Data provider/Resource person (persons/groups, community representatives)

1. Bhupati Ranjan Roy, 2. Bithi Roy 3. Swaksar Adhikary, E-mail: niloyutsav@gmail.com; BRAC University, Biotechnology, Anthropology

□ Date of data collection

19-05-2020

□ Place(s) of data collection

From cellphone

□ Section-6: Safeguarding techniques

Existing safeguarding techniques adopted by the community for the safeguarding of the Heritage

There is a Mandir community and committee that looks after it.

Suggestions for safeguarding of the Heritage from the community

The festival is turning to be more commercial. This can be made more empowering to the local by promoting local handicrafts more and arranging cultural shows as per with the history and tradition of the temple, while being sensitive to the sanctity of the event.

Section-7: References to literature, discography, audiovisual materials or archives

References to/in literature

Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth-century Bengal [Book] / auth. Ghosh Pika. - [s.l.] : Indiana University Press, 2005. Lyrics in Terracotta at Kantajeer Mandir - Muhammad Sirajuddin, Dhaka, 1992; Archaeological Survey Report of Greater Dinajpur District, DOA, 1995; Kantajee Temple, UNESCO, 2005; History in Pictures- Greater Rangpur and Dinajpur, Area HQs, Rangpur, 2008.

Audiovisual materials or archives

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hkSD88oy7vI> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1yi6ZKVTgU>

Discography or archives

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Section-8: Modalities for updating the information contained in the inventory entry

Data Compiler (persons/groups, including community representatives, who compiled the information)

1. Bhupani Ranjan Roy, 2. Bithi Roy 3. Swaksar Adhikary, +8801738402815 E-mail: niloyutsav@gmail.com; BRAC University, Biotechnology, Anthropology

Date of Community Consent

Consent of community/group/individuals concerned for data collection with a view to inventorying

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Present Condition of Heritage

Still maintaining

Brief description of Present condition of the Heritage, (if any)

Still maintaining

Section-9: Community suggestions

Brief description of suggestions for safeguarding of the element by community members/experts/holders, (if any)

Promoting it more

Restrictions on use of collected data, (if any).

Due to the restrictions of the 'lockdown' during COVID19 pandemic, it was not possible to arrange face-to-face interviews.

Consent Document



Heritage Details Document



Heritage Images

