

Assessing the potential of Gopachal Rock-Cut Colossal as a heritage asset: Issues and Challenges

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Abstract:

In global tourism parlance, India is perceived as a cultural and heritage destination. Every year millions of foreign tourists visit India and spend more duration than what they had planned to spend in India. India has an abundance of cultural and heritage resources in the form of art, architecture, and archaeology where it not only offers a sight of Indian art and archaeological sites but also offers several foreign art and archaeological styles, various fairs and festivals, and other cultural events, etc. Preservation, conservation, and management of such sites especially rock-cut sites had always been a challenge for the government and private bodies but due to the Novel Corona Virus Covid 19 these challenges have acquired a new face. This Covid 19 pandemic has greatly impacted the travel & tourism industry, no segment of tourism has remained unaffected by this since tourism needs the physical presence of the person at the place of activity hence following the protocol of the pandemic was a very tough situation to get the things done as usual unlike other industries, except virtual tourism no other form of tourism could take place. Earlier at rock-cut caves, carrying capacity and protection of sites from vandalism were the major concerns and issues but how the issues changed in the post-pandemic phase will be discussed in this paper. This paper investigates the issues in the pre & post-COVID-19 phase faced by the tourists and authorities involved in the management of such sites using an introspective approach, hence we need a transformation in our management strategies. In this paper, we will introspect the major concerns and issues that management authorities are facing these days and what kind of plan they need to follow to tackle them. We will also discuss what measures we can suggest to tackle this situation without causing much impact on the performance of tourism and tourist satisfaction.

Keywords: Tourism, rock-cut site, Jain, strategies, covid 19.

Introduction

Gwalior is known for its cultural heritage founded by King Suraj Sen in the 7th/8th century when a sage Gwalipa cured him of leprosy. There is no written evidence available for the establishment year of Gwalior. Gopachal rock cut caves situated in the heart of Gwalior city have always been an eye treat for tourists because of their beautiful architecture and deep roots in the history of Gwalior and Jain religion. These monuments are also popular as Shri Digambar Jain Atishay Kshetra or Jain rock art temples consisting of huge Jain Tirthankar's beautiful rock idols. This makes it a cultural, heritage, and religious tourist site but still fails to attract a good

number of tourists because of poor management. These caves were built between the 7th -15th century by Tomar King Dungar Singh- his queen, his successors, and Kirti Singh as per the inscription found at the site. It was believed either the queen herself belonged to the Jain religion or was a great follower of the Jain (non-violent) religion. Gopachal rock-cut caves are located on the eastern part of the Gopachal hill and comprise 2 temples and 26 caves having idols of Jain Tirthankar. Some of them are around 10 meters tall while few others are between 2-5 meters. Largest of all is Tirthankar Parsvanatha's statue seated on a lotus which is 17 meters tall. When Emperor Babur ordered the monuments to be destroyed in the 1527s, they were vandalized and desecrated. Quote: "Babar, the Mughal emperor, wrote in his memoirs" that the Urvahi Jinas had been mutilated in 1527. According to Jain religious literature, Tirthankar Parsvanatha delivered his teaching on this hill.

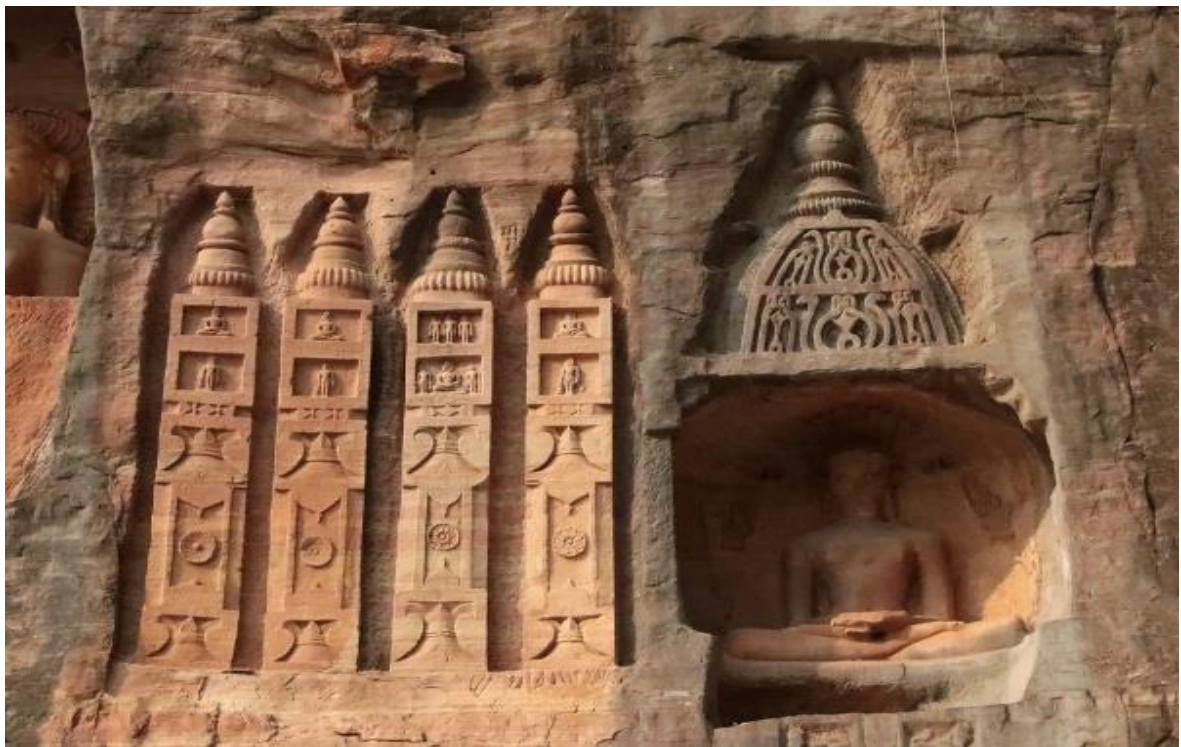


Image 1: Tirthankar is sitting in a meditation yoga pose.

Image Source: Google

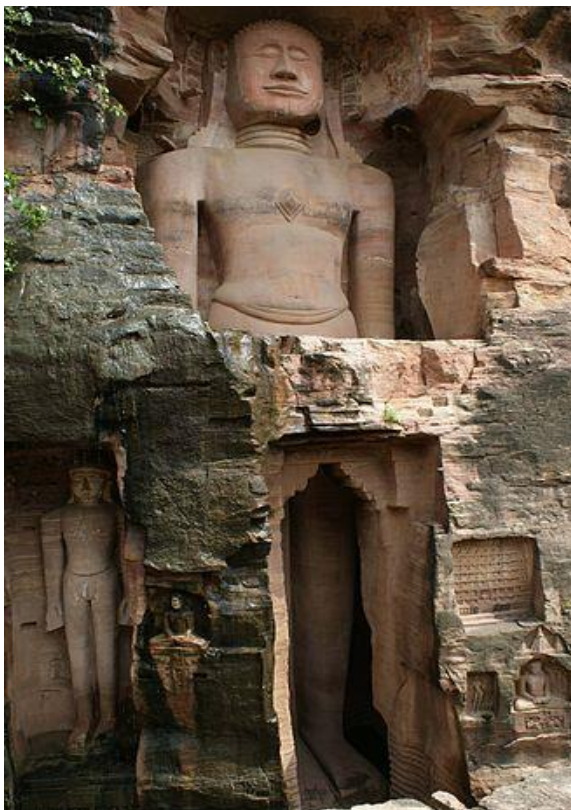


Image 2: Shree Adinath's Statue at Gopachal Mountain

Image source: Google

Image 1, illustrates a Jain tirthankar in a sitting meditation pose which is beautifully carved out of the rock, intricacies in carving are mesmerizing and keep oneself spellbound. Similarly, Image 2 illustrates a beautifully carved statue of Shree Adinath Maharaj, it is one of the grandest statues among other rock-cut sculptures at Gopachal mountain. Anyone can have an assumption about the beauty of this rock cut colossal from these images, unfortunately, this mesmerizing site remained almost untapped due to the ignorance of the locals.

There is no hyperbole in claiming that most of the rock art sites in and around Gwalior are untapped and so are Gopachal rock-cut caves. These sites are merely visited by researchers and scholars and this may be the reason why these sites are overlooked and are not properly managed and maintained. Rock art research from archaeological and conservation perspectives has been conducted by various research scholars. Nevertheless, rock art research from the tourism context is still in its babyhood. Meanwhile, the available research also does not focus on the contribution of rock art to the socio-economic development of the host communities. They are only focussed mainly on the culture and the historic significance of the sites. Whereas in the case of Gopachal Rock cut caves no research has been done yet, especially in the context of tourism. In addition, researchers gave less attention to management issues and sustainable tourism development of the site. In response to this, our study revolves around the issues or challenges that are being faced by local management authorities while managing tourism activities at rock-cut sites. Since India is a vast country having several

Jain rocks cut architectural monuments hence it was not possible to cover all the sites so, we selected a single site where we could carry out our study and relate it to other sites too which will help other managing teams in efficient management planning. In this study, we will address all the major issues from pre and post Covid 19 phase although post covid19 challenges have acquired a new terrifying face. Going through many research papers & articles and other published relevant secondary resources we came to know that post-Covid 19 tourists are looking for destinations where tourist footfall is less in number to feel safe and to maintain social distancing. As a result, the scope of new tourist sites or less popular tourist sites has increased, provided these are well managed. Which we will discuss in this paper.

Since tourism management comprises many elements hence to manage any site the managing authority has to use all the elements efficiently, missing any element will lead to tourist dissatisfaction resulting in a negative image of the destination. Tourism management is a coordinated process, where almost all aspects of a tourist site are managed, including marketing efforts, local resources, accommodation, activities, events, environmental concerns, and transportation. It is usually the responsibility of a destination management company (DMC).

Methodology

Technique: Qualitative method has been used for this study. The introspective approach is used in the qualitative method, for this we visited the site and arranged interviews of authorized personnel.

Data: Primary data collection is done through interviews. Secondary data is collected through different published sources to review the situation of other such sites enabling us to compare a comparison of Gopachal rock-cut cave with other sites like Ajanta Cave, Ellora Cave, and so on. In addition, a descriptive & narrative approach was used to analyze data from observation and interview.

Sampling: Convenient sampling was used for interviews.

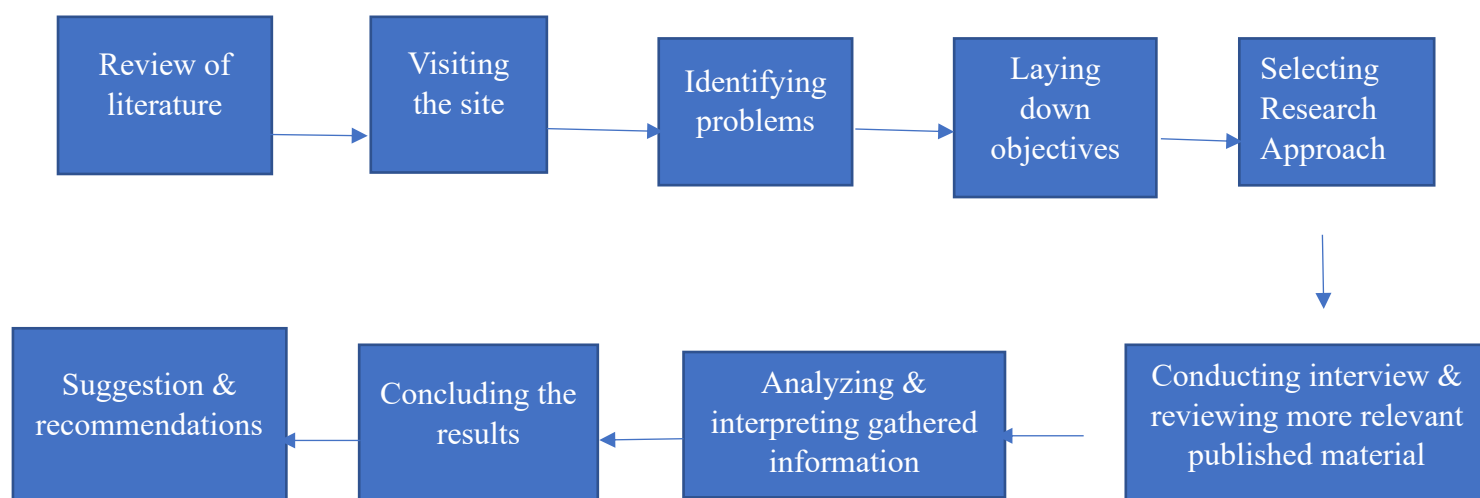


Fig 1: Process followed in this study

Fig 1 illustrates the step-by-step process followed in conducting this study to impart light on what has been performed at different stages of the study to get to the depth of findings and suggestions.

Objectives

Till today very little work has been done in the dimension of tourism perspective of rock-cut caves hence not much of the literature is available to diagnose the current situation, most of the research is either on conservation- protection or historical or scientific perspectives, however, few contents are available for sustainable tourism development and overall development of rock cut sites. The purpose of this study is to specifically address the following goals.

- Identifying the problems faced by the management team before and post-COVID-19.
- Assessing prospects for rock art sites especially post covid 19 phase.
- Bringing out solutions for the existing problems.
- Suggesting a code of conduct for tourists.
- Identifying the root cause of problems.

Findings

In this study, issues in the management of a rock art site are evaluated through observation and discussion with experts and managerial staff engaged in the rock art sites of Gopachal caves. Interviews were used to identify and evaluate challenges in management.

Tourism management inadequacies can be seen in the maintenance of the site, promotion of tourism, and facilities for tourists.

Tourist who are willing to shoot videos at Gopachal has to take permission tokens from Gwalior Fort hence they have to go to Gwalior Fort first to purchase a camera ticket and then they have to come back again to shoot videos at Gopachal. This causes great inconvenience for tourists as it spoils their traveling experience. Other than this there are a lot more deficiencies in management. Since this site has religious value tourist has to visit the whole site barefoot whereas, broken stones or pieces of rocks can be seen lying here and there, visitors have to walk carefully otherwise they could hurt their feet. Tourists who are ignorant of the sentiments associated with the site can raise the situation of cultural clashes in the absence of a code of conduct for tourists. There is no facility for relaxing and taking food & beverages at the site for the refreshment. Authorities are forced to follow some procedures so that the sentiments associated with the Jain religion do not get hurt.

Sculptures at the site were destroyed by Mughal emperor Babur but till now no restoration work has been done either by ASI (Archaeological Survey of India), the state tourism board, DMOs' or local authorities. The site greatly needs the recreation of the broken sculpture or restoration work. Any visitor will be least interested in watching broken sculptures hence to sustain the interest of visitor authorities need to start the restoration work on topmost priority.

As far as security of the site and tourists is concerned there are only two guards, one on day shift and the other on night shift however site is open day and night too hence it requires a better security system to develop the feeling of safety among tourist visiting the site at late evening hours. Even, though no guiding facility is available at this site, the tourist has to read the inscription on their own to know the facts and background of the place but the information provided in these inscriptions is very limited know more about the site tourist has to struggle a lot as no other source of information is available at the site.

Moreover, the tourist information desk or tourist help desk is missing here so in case if a visitor needs to get any further information to plan his onward trip he has to look for other means of information. For better tourism management and to enhance the experience of tourist information counter or help desk should be made available at site. Vehicle parking is minimal. Thus, in case of the increased number of tourists people face parking problems.

The irony is that the local community is ignorant of this heritage, they consider it a casual tourist spot. No promotion and marketing campaigns are being run for this particular site except a small article on the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Board website, even most of the Gwalior tour packages do not include this site on their list, this is the reason why Gwalior has always been popular for its fort and Jia Vilas Palace and not for this rock art site which can contribute in tourism growth of Gwalior and can serve as a new tourism product for Gwalior.

In addition to the above, in this post, covid 19 phase sanitizations have become an essential requirement but the excessive use of sanitizers is causing a loss to the luster of rock-cut sculptures, losing the beauty of the place.

Conclusion

Through this study, we can conclude that Gopachal rock-cut caves have great potential for tourism if the issues are addressed properly. In the absence of efficient planning and management, this site is limited to local tourists and religious tourists of the Jain community. That too is very few in numbers.

Since COVID-19, people have been looking for places where comparatively fewer tourists are traveling, unlike other tourist places. Thus, this rock art site has potential as a new tourism product for economic, socio-cultural, aesthetic, and artistic values. Since every tourist is looking for some new experiences, this site can provide scope for heritage, eco, Geo, religious, spiritual, and educational tourism.

To address all the management issues our DMOs, ASI, State Tourism Board, and local agencies and community should work in close collaboration, INTACH is very active in Gwalior and currently busy with recreation work of Victoria market but if parallelly it starts project for the restoration of Gopachal rock art, which will lead for the better tourism growth at the site and in the city too.

Awareness among the locals can lead to better conservation of the art and architecture.

These rock art sites are the best sites for tourist destinations, if they are properly managed by preparing management plans and by opening infrastructures, they become additional tourist destinations. These resources can be the best way to alleviate poverty in the region and can generate alternative sources of income for the region's host community and for the country too.

Maintenance, Conservation, And Research

There is no alternative to artifacts and the vandalized artifacts cannot be recreated but can be conserved. Hence, the conservation work should start on an immediate basis to preserve the badly vandalized rock art. The absence of research on the tourism perspective is one of the reasons why it is failing to attract the attention of authorities. Thus, special attention must be given to this place of archeological importance. New research programs are very important to analyze and identify the means for the development and conservation of the site.

Tourism Development At Gopachal Rock Cut Caves

A tourism development program for the Gopachal rock cut caves should be designed concerning promotion activities, guidance, tourist facilities, and a code of conduct for tourists. Some of the plans that need to be implemented on an immediate basis such as suitable background should be created for tourism improvement and rock art management, for this basic elements and services required for tourism management should be made available at the site on an immediate basis.

Suggestions And Recommendation

Tourism is a service industry and its growth depends on the quality of services provided by the service providers and stakeholders involved in the industry. A small discomfort in the experience of tourists leads to a negative image of the place. Thus, despite troubling tourists, the management team can use runners and rugs at sites to comfort tourists while visiting the site barefoot. Ticket-like video-capturing tickets should be made available at the site itself.

To enhance the experience of tourists' adequate facility for a tourist information Centre or desk should be arranged as in the absence of an information desk individual tourists would not be able to plan their forward trip and on the other hand, tourists specially involved in research work, academics or research and development work also need the updated data and information of the site. This would enhance the research

prospects at the site which would result in the growth and development of the said rock art. At the same time, guiding facilities should also be arranged on the site through archeology officers or well-trained guides to guide tourist groups. Initially, this service must be started for free or with nominal charges, other than these authorities assigned at this site can also publish guidebooks both in English and Hindi enabling both domestic and international tourists to go through the guidebook. Sovereign counters and shops are made available that will work as a cherry on the cake.

ASI should work on the restoration work as the top priority as well and DMOs should also put their effort into the conservation and preservation work of the site, for these plans and strategies should be designed and implemented on an immediate basis before it gets too late to conserve this site. This site also needs special arrangements for parking.

An appealing marketing and promotion campaign should be developed to promote the site for this if the state tourism board can organize events at this place like Namaste Orchha etc. can work as a catalyst in the development of the site. Promotion brands, electronic media, viral marketing, newspaper articles, and magazines can be used for tourism promotion activities. Large promotion boards or hoardings can be installed at different points of the city in and around too, showcasing attractive pictures of the site and some interesting facts along with the distance from various places to the site. Even passing by visitors could read it and be pulled towards the rock art site. This rock art site can be promoted as a cultural and adventure tourism place through which we can target almost all categories of tourists, especially young tourists, archeologists, academicians, nature lovers, and so on. Activity-based tourism such as climbing, trekking, etc can play a vital role in the popularity of the said site, these activities must be indicated in the promotion boards. New paper and magazine articles, radio, and television advertisements, and web platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Telegram are proposed to be used as tools for promotion mechanisms.

In the view of current scenario of COVID-19, sanitization has become an essential need of every person and place but excessive use of sanitizers leads to deterioration in rock art so better if the alternative form of sanitization or less chemical-based sanitization is done in a manner that less of its adverse effect is found on rock art.

A code of conduct should be drafted for tourists to avoid any kind of cultural clash such as no one will litter at the site, no one should be allowed to touch the monuments, etc. Awareness camps should be arranged for the local community.

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**Assessing the potential of Gopachal Rock-Cut Colossal as a heritage asset: Issues and
Challenges**

Published in Volume 01, Issue 02, December 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Shipra Singh Chauhan', is written over a horizontal line.

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