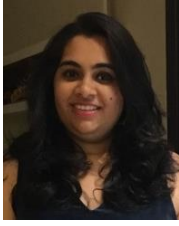


Cultivating Culture in the lost Portuguese Village in Mumbai, India



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Abstract: *Culture connects everyone either actively or passively. It has evolved through generations and the millennials are contradicting the ways of the old times. This new generation has begun to lose their sense of belonging to their community and place. The concept of ‘cultivating culture’ talks about both ends of culture, i.e. the past and present. The same will be understood with a case study of Ranwar village, Bandra in a suburb of Mumbai. With time the culture of this village cultivated that is it was close-knit communities since generations, even today seen today through local community participation, take place in the village square for events. This paper explores how with time the sense of belonging within the community changed. Once where there were Portuguese cottages, are being destroyed today to build skyscrapers is one of the many issues faced by this community. Overall, this case study will help in understanding how the community cultivated their culture in order to protect their ‘Portuguese’ identity.*

Keywords: *Cultivating culture, Portuguese, place attachment, community spaces, adapting*

Kültür Geliştirme, Hindistan Mumbai’deki Kayıp Portekiz Köyü Örneği

Öz: *Kültür, herkesi aktif veya pasif olarak birbirine bağlar. Nesiller boyunca gelişir ve eski zamanların yöntemleriyle çelişebilir. Yeni nesil, topluma ve bulunduğu yere aidiyet duygusunu yitirmeye başlamıştır. "Kültür geliştirme" kavramı, kültürün geçmişini ve bugünü içerir. Bu çalışmada kültür geliştirme çalışma alanı konusu olarak seçilen, Mumbai'nin bir banliyösündeki Bandra, Ranwar köyü örneği üzerinden anlaşılmasına çalışılacaktır. Zamanla gelişen köy kültürü geçmişteki bağlarını kaybetmemiştir. Yerel halkın katılımlarını içeren köy meydanı etkinlikleri bu konuda önemli bir örnektir. Bu makale, topluluk içindeki aidiyet duygusunun zamanla nasıl değiştiğini araştırıyor. Bir zamanlar Portekiz kulüblerinin bulunduğu yerde, bugün gökdelenlerin inşa edilmesi bu topluluğun karşılaştığı birçok sorundan biridir. Genel olarak, bu vaka çalışması, topluluğun 'Portekizli' kimliğini korumak için kültürünü nasıl geliştirdiğini anlamaya yardımcı olmaya yöneliktir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kültür geliştirme, Portekiz, topluluk hissi, topluluk mekânları, çevreye uyum*

1. INTRODUCTION

Culture is one of the most common terms used to describe one’s being. It can be a lifestyle, food, festival or even a dressing style. According to the Oxford University, culture is the “way of life of people, their attitudes, values, beliefs, arts and the knowledge they have gained in the processes” [1].

When it comes to historians or conservators to explain this term, they often began romanticizing with the past and would be unhappy with the “culture” of the current generation. But it cannot be ignored that culture is a process, and in new times, culture will also evolve. Hence, a tiff is always seeing in whether one should adopt to the new ways or hold on to what was been practiced by our ancestors. The *Bhagvad Gita*, which

is considered to be as holy as The Bible or The Quran for Hindus, also mentions that “Change is the law of the universe”. It explains that this world, whether its living or non-living will change fast but the only thing that will remain intact is the “process of change”, hence one should accept and embrace this change. With time the lifestyle and environment changes, resulting in evolution of towns and cities. But with this evolving time, it is also important to know about our ancestral roots and how to hold them along with embracing the changing times. The case study taken into consideration for this paper will explore how an urban village is successful to sustain its ancestral culture along with the changing times.

The *Ranwar* Village, an urban village, has its roots from the seventeenth century and even today it holds a historic touch in spite of being located within the hustle-bustle of one of the most populated cities in the world, Mumbai. In this village, even today there are many houses which have with Portuguese origin and the bungalows are built in the colonial-style. Each of these houses would be more than a hundred years old and has an undying culture attached to it. And with time the culture of this village is being cultivated, where the younger generations are taking steps to help their close-knit community to survive.

2. BACKGROUND OF RANWAR VILLAGE, BANDRA, MUMBAI, INDIA

2.1. Location

The Ranwar Village is a part of suburb, Bandra on the western side of Mumbai.

2.2. Portuguese Influence On The Islands

Until the twelfth century the islands did not exist on any political maps of the native kingdoms or on other invading foreign armies. These islands were nothing but archipelagos of seven quaint islands off the Western coast of India. It was in the fifteenth century when Vasco De Gama first reached the Southern tip of the subcontinent and slowly by the sixteenth century the Portuguese acquired several territories and began constructing churches and forts.

According to the Bombay Gazetteer volume III, it was in 1534, when the Portuguese signed a treaty with the Sultanate of Gujarat, which allowed them to build fort on the island. Since, the territory of Bombay did not have any claim of governance; and this gave the Portuguese to establish their colonial “presence” in Bombay. They called this place as the “*Bom Bahia*”, in Portuguese which meant “the good bay”.

These islands were surrounded by shallow sea, which restricted the land use to rice and coconut cultivation. Although the major landmass was the territory of the Portuguese but it also had a small number of settlements, inhabited by the native fishermen or *Koli* community and a small Hindu population. These *Koli* communities were the oldest residents, with a possibility that some of the sites may have been in existence in since the Iron Age, as mentioned in the Gazetteer.

The Gazetteer also mentions that the landscape of these islands was not changed since the thirteenth century including the social, cultural, or economic patterns of the locals. The primary intention of the Portuguese rule was the spread of Christianity, and economic activity was a secondary objective. This could be seen in the pre-British landscape where there were no major city building efforts or any civic building of importance [7].

2.3. East India Company And Its Impact On Bandra

The crucial times between British and Portuguese began from the 1660s. On one hand, the British had just initiated their colonial project in India, and on the other hand, the Portuguese were undermined to continue to their religious policies to hold their the control over Bombay. The faith of these islands changed in the seventeenth century after a “marriage treaty”. It was between Charles II King of England and Donna

Catharina of Portugal was arranged in 1661. The seven islands were one of the items given to the British Crown as a dowry [7].

During the 1670-1680s, British began building their forts on strategic locations, i.e. the Sion fort which was built on the northernmost tip of the islands, and then the Mahim fort was also created. Sion fort overlooked the only land rout that connected the archipelago to the Portuguese claimed Salsette. The Bandra fort or the “Castella de Aguada” overlooked the Southern shore as a post against any naval threats. Mainly the projects undertaken by the Company were aimed to protect the settlement of Bombay. Now, soon the forts which were built by the Portuguese on Salsette became active and saw more foot soldiers to protect their territories.

2.4. The East Indians

With the Portuguese invading India, they introduced the concept of Roman Catholicism and the locals were forced to follow Christianity. The high-class Hindus who decided to get converted, the Portuguese began to distinct them from others treated them with honor. Even while the East India Company was busy reclaiming their seven islands and building forts, the community remained a separate entity on the mainland. They often referred to them as “Portuguese Christians”. It was only the ‘Portuguese Christians’ who were able to read and write Roman characters. As a result, the British gave them the posts of clerks, assistants and secretaries. This was nothing but a boon for the Indian Christians, because with development of railways and steamships, more Christians from the Southern parts of the subcontinent (which were once Portuguese territories) came to Bombay for jobs [7].

Now, with the British inviting merchants from various regions of the subcontinent to settle on the islands, the “Portuguese Christians” wanted to have their own identity, which would protect their original ancestry on the region. It was on the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria where they demanded to be called “East Indians”. By demanding for a tittle, they not only impressed the British Government of Bombay but also claimed that they were the earliest Roman Catholic Subjects and local to the British Crown. Moreover, being the original settlers of this region, they requested on the British to entitle them to certain natural rights and give privileges against the emigrants who were settling in the new reclaimed islands of Bombay [7].

The Ranwar Village is one of the many villages of the “East Indians”. Even today, the East Indian Catholics can speak Marathi, which is the local language of the state, and follow Christianity, maintaining their ancestral culture with Portuguese influence and cultivating their culture with the changing times of the society.

2.5. Historical Significance

As seen above, the history of the Ranwar Village exists back to even before the India was invaded by the Portuguese. With these layers of invasion and events, history of this urban fabric can be traced back to the 1580’s.



Figure 1. Sketch of a conceptual vision of the Ranwar Village in 1610 (Kishnadwala, 2021)

2.6. Architectural Significance

Architecture of the Ranwar village is one of the important aspects which have helped to read the Portuguese and Colonial influence on its urban planning and cottages. The houses are concentrated along an organic street spine and the opening up of narrow streets and form squares has given a distinct variety of styles and streetscapes in different sections of the precinct.

A Typical East Indian House has different proportions when compared to the other housing forms from the past. Their spaces are designed such that a major proportion space is dedicated for community activities, which was much larger in earlier days than today. The verandahs are large, generally open to streets. These verandahs are also designed for people to chat or gather while doing their household chores. Since, they are close-knit communities the whole neighborhood is invited for the most of the events and hence the living room is a large area, to occupy everyone. Generally birthdays, marriages and other events the whole community is invited.

In an interview with Times of India, Mr. David Cardoz talks about this village and emphasis the ambience in detail, “links pervasive sense of comfort to the low-scale village-scape, where the houses sprang up in organic response to the surroundings, be it climate or neighbors. The old-cottages have low-windows for the wind to breeze to have a non-disturbed entry to the houses and delicate fret worked verandahs, which help in demarking the open and semi-open spaces. The entire village has awkward nooks and corners to accommodate cycles and scooters, all roads merging at the town square” [2].

Another typical architecture feature is sloping roofs, to adapt to the weather of Mumbai where there are heavy rains four months of the year. In addition, these houses are mostly load bearing and one or two storied, structurally members are timber, walls of bricks and lime plastered. One of the easiest ways of identifying an East Indian house is by big wooden porches and external staircases.



Figure 2. Image of a typical house (exterior) at the Ranwar Village (Kishnadwala, 2017)
Figure 3. Sketch of a façade of typical house (exterior) at the Ranwar Village (Kishnadwala, 2021)

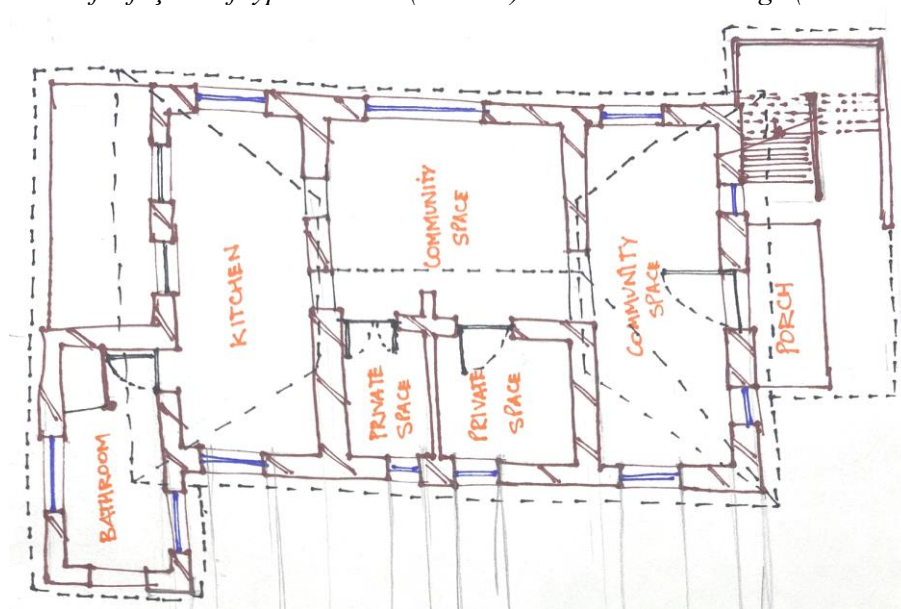




Figure 4 .Sketch of a plan and elevation of a typical house at the Ranwar Village (Kishnadwala, 2021)

2.7. Associational Significance: The Community

The community is a close-knit, which is not limited to only the residents of a particular hamlet but as “a community of East Indians”. Even though they belong to different regions, i.e. Basin, Salsette and Thana they take pride as original inhabitants of Bombay (now Mumbai). They also have a webpage for in order to promote and protect their culture, an initiative to maintain their association this community [7].

2.8. Living Heritage

The spaces in this village are active and vibrant if compared to any other village. Since the community is close-knit they will be found most of the time together either praying or gathered around a corner chit-chatting. Most of the elderly would also be seen sitting in the verandah busy reading a newspaper with a grandchild sitting along playing a musical instrument. Many cottages and houses have been converted to cafes or bakeries, and these would constantly have the fresh aroma of the breads baked, complementing the fragrance of the coconut milk curries cooked in these houses.

Another important aspect adding to value to living heritage is the Christ Crosses. There are around 36 old churches, most of them dating from nineteenth century. These were not built only for religious purposes, but in order to ward the evil from entering their village. But, there are also many others who mention that they were built during the plague that broke in the city in mid-nineteenth century and to protect them from the people suffering the plague.

In case weddings, the entire town square would be lit, women conducting their prayers for the bride and groom, with dancing and singing, which would not be identified by a commoner since they are neither in Marathi or English or Hindi. The rituals during weddings and birthdays are also quite elaborate, where the community ensures that everyone whether it is an adult or a child present actively participates in these activities.

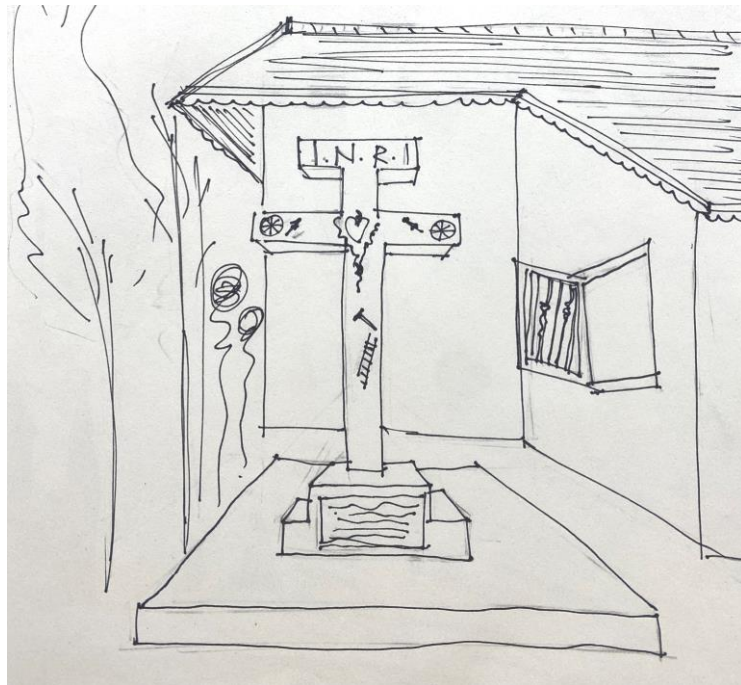


Figure 5. Sketch of Christ cross next to cottage in the Ranwar Village (Kishnadwala, 2021)

3. “CONTRASTING WORLDS”: THE CURRENT SCENARIO

Bandra, a suburb in Mumbai, which is also known as the “The Queen of the Suburbs” and *Ranwar* is one of the twenty-one original “Pakhadis” or *hamlet* which is still existing in Bandra. According to a news report, *Ranwar* has a cluster of forty-two houses and a population of four hundred residents registered and this village is like a time capsule, taking one back 150 years back through the village.

However, one of the most unfortunate parts is that this urban village is also on the verge of decline. Mainly, due to the insensitive developments forced due to the ever-expanding need of space in the city. With the city center changing its focus to this suburb, there is a serious market force to convert this village amongst the others as a commercial, retail and residential hub.

The developers and the builders see these houses as “waste of spaces” and encourage the residents to build a skyscraper by showing them the ‘good image of modern lifestyles’. In addition, adding to this, the developers are successful in convincing them that these are waste spaces and living in a skyscraper would provide them the required modern necessities.

This village is a basic example of urban development, which is affecting village life and comprising the ancestral culture by giving away their leftover open spaces. The situation is such today that one will see newly built skyscrapers coexisting with a 1 -2 story Portuguese cottages and bungalow, a “Contrasting World”. This, however might be seem pleasing to many, but it is not as peaceful as it looks, because with these high-rise buildings comes the others issues such as; population, waters, bad sanitation, heavy traffic, lack of risk preparedness and so forth.

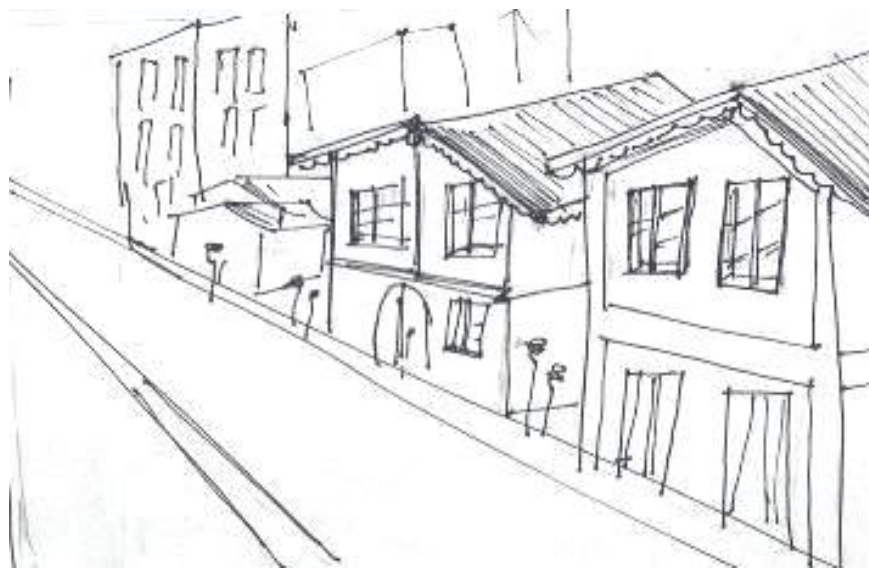


Figure 6. Sketch of one of the streets of Ranwar Village showing the contrasting worlds (Kishnadwala, 2021)

3.1. Heritage Byelaws For Bandra Prescient

In 1995, Bombay was the first city in the country to have Heritage Byelaws formulated to protect the heritage of the city. In this the Bandra prescient (of which the Ranwar is a part) was included. However, this was an advantage for the prescient but a major disadvantage was that it was graded Grade II B.

This grading does help in protecting the unique features but also encourages changes on the exterior façade. As a Grade II B, the prescient only needs to maintain its authentic character, but the reconstruction of buildings is permitted if it is structurally weak or affected by a calamity. And for reconstruction they need to seek permission from the Development board of Mumbai. The owners in hope of living in a skyscraper had over their properties to the builders for reconstructing under false reports, resulting in loss of these bungalows and cottages.

4. CULTIVATING CULTURE TO ADAPT TO THE CHANGING SCENARIO

As it has already been studied, Bandra is one of the few places surviving, giving a glimpse of the past, bears of the East Indian culture, sense of community. Even today, people still know their neighbors with a surviving street and pedestrian culture, encouraging foster incidental interactions. But in spite of all of this, the *Ranwar* Village is constantly adapting and accepting the changing times. It is not only that their houses, the tangible part which they are supposed to protect, but also their intangible culture. Along with this a constant fight of proving themselves the original natives of this city, the “East Indians”, along with the pressure of urbanism.

In today’s scenario, there are many who have recognized the significance of this village and have been taken many initiatives such as to revive the main Town Square. Also, the existing houses were revived so that a passerby would be able to imagine the original grandeur it would carried in those days. The younger generations have also actively participated in their ways to keep the vibe of the village lively by converting their homes to small cafes and by encouraging the artists to use their walls for graffiti, in a way introducing many photographers and foreign nationals to visit their village, in a way creating awareness [3].

4.1. Urban Conservation and Regeneration of Ranwar Village

Many locals who also were professionals realised the value of this village and took initiative to protect the losing culture of the village. One of them was “The Busride Studios”, based in one of these cottages at the *Ranwar* Village in Bandra. In 2010, they realized that there were many similar hamlets in Bandra which were more than a century old cottages and have the local vernacular styles that might have been existed even before the Portuguese invasion.

The project was to document this hamlet that was through the East Indian Catholic community, which originally belonged to the “agrarian paddy cultivators”. They carried the lineage from centuries, and it was reflected in their ways of living in these houses, their lifestyle and so forth, differentiating them the other city dwellers. Their work was based on the philosophy from Aldo Rossi’s book *Architecture of the Cities*, which said that a city is a memory of the people and like memory it is associated with its objects and in their way of living. It is this which becomes the “city’s predominant image”, which is reflected in their architecture and landscapes.

The aim of the project was to identify and understand the character on this hamlet and make the common people understand the value of their neighborhood. They also highlighted the never ending conflict between the conserving these houses and to match the ever-ending need of the city. The studio began their documentation of the hamlet by first understanding the lifestyle of the residents with respect to the spaces they lived in. Later, they conducted a detailed qualitative spatial analysis of the environment, which emphasized the significance of their hamlet. After identifying the significances, the team lead analysis and worked on conservation plan. Blogging was another tool which allowed them to reach the larger base of people to get their opinions. These modes also become a mode for people to share their ancestral stories which helped in documenting the project [3].

4.1.1.The Town Square Revitalization

With some awareness about this village in the 2015s, an architecture firm, *SDM Architects* (based in Mumbai) sent their proposal to the Mumbai Metropolitan Region’s Heritage Conservation Society. The society agreed to fund along with some local politicians. The main aim of this project was to revitalize the Town Square of the *Ranwar* Village [4].

The revitalization included the reviving the front façades of these hamlets and paving the town square, making it more accessible and user friendly.



Figure 7. Recent image of the Ranwar Village Town Square (Kishnadwala, 2016)

4.2. Economic Model For Sustainable Conservation

With the some conservation projects being successful, it was also important to design an economic model for the village. Since, conservation of any place is successful only if it is sustainable. In the case of the *Ranwar* Village, where the community had strong sense of belonging they needed to design an economic model showcasing the same. This would help them to sustain their livelihoods in this neighborhood. Hence, again with the help organizations such as The Busride Studio, they took initiatives and opened their doors to visitors to have a sneak peek to the life of an “East Indian” family. Many of these initiatives are mentioned below.

4.2.1. The Ranwar Festival

Amongst the many initiatives, one was the *Ranwar* Festival, an annual festival that is organized by the locals for everyone. The locals, mostly being Christians organize it some days prior to the Christmas so that visitors could prepare of the festive season and also help in selling goodies needed for Christmas. Most of the stalls are by the locals, many of these offer authentic meals and desserts from their household, which are a blend of the Portuguese and Marathi culture. This festival, not only helped the locals to open their doors for outsiders, but also encouraged outsiders to be able to part of the culture which many would not have even heard or seen anywhere else.

4.2.2. Graffiti

During the 2010s, Bandra opened up some of its walls to encourage street art projects to liven public spaces with color, form and texture. Within the neighborhood of *Ranwar*, many iconic works can be found. These graffiti portrays the most common subjects from the daily life of Mumbai in various forms. Some would look back at the Bombay of the past or to the contemporary life or stills from Bollywood. It so happened that today, these cottages and streets of *Ranwar* have become quite vibrant, making it a part of art lover’s paradise. Further, this has also encouraged tourists and indirectly helping to boost the economics for the residents [3]

4.2.3. Heritage Walks

Another initiative that has brought this village in light is the Heritage Walks. Heritage walks are often described as an activity for elite to spend their Sunday mornings. But on the brighter side, these help in creating a lot of awareness. Many times, these walks are arranged specially for architecture students, so that they can take up it as their case studies and document these losing gems. With the help of social media, where the heritage walk participants often share their experience, have created more awareness and their followers take an attempt to visit these locations.

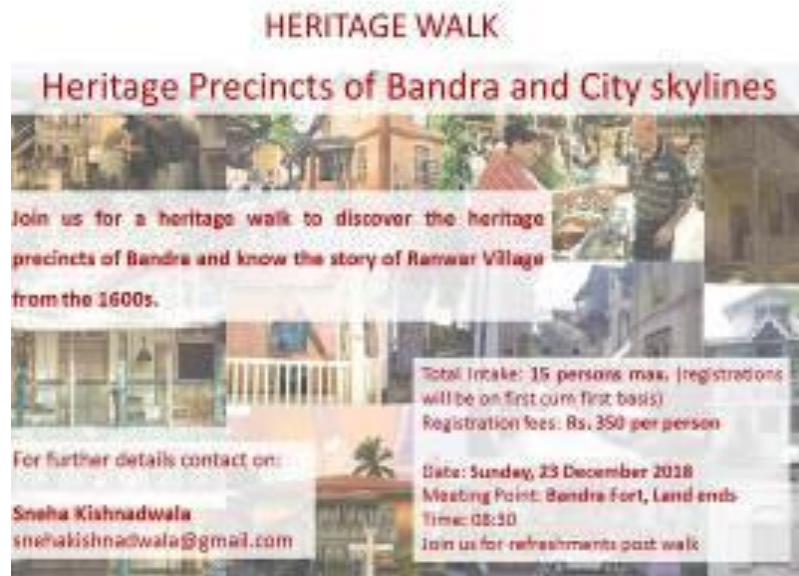


Figure 8 .Poster for heritage walks at Ranwar Village (Kishnadwala, 2017).



Figure 9. Image of the corresponding author with her students at the Heritage Walk (Kishnadwala, 2018)

4.2.4. Cafes And Bakeries

Cuisine is the 'East Indians' have also been discussed but the recipes are not known to many in the city. Taking this to their advantage, locals have invested in cafes and bakeries. Also, the location, i.e. the suburb, Bandra has its own vibe, very the residents are quite at leisure. One would often find them playing a musical instrument and singing or sipping beverages in their verandahs. A similar vibe with their cuisine is offered in their cafes. Many locals have converted their cottages or bungalows to a cafés, offering some lost dishes from their past. This kind of an economic model helps not only helps the residents financially but also maintains their Portuguese culture. *Ranwar's* Judee Bakery is one of the finest examples of converting their cottage to a financial model amongst the many others found in the neighborhood.

5. CONCLUSION

With time; culture, traditions, livelihood and etc. all tend to change and one need to begin to accept this change, as it is seen in the *Ranwar* village. The village has not only survived through the change of rulers to change in their religion to their professions, to protecting their identity in these political times but even today they have been able to maintain their culture with a twist of the modernity in their own way.

This village can be considered as a classic example for how to make conservation, sustainable, by cultivating their culture and making it appreciated by a much larger group of people. It is also important for conservationists or professionals like us to encourage locals to understand the significance and value of these communities, instead of just laying a road for them which has no relation to their past or culture. Further, it is a community that can only protect their culture, but only by cultivating with new times these cultures can survive.

This paper has discussed a case study of only a small village but there are many such examples in Mumbai, such as *Khothachiwadi*, *Makhepakdi* and many more. These too need to maintain their character and have been fighting to protect their identity in a city which is fond of constructing and living in skyscrapers.

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