

Assessing the Impact of Heritage Tourism on Rural Settlements: A Case Study of Pedgaon, Maharashtra

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Abstract: Rural settlements possessing significant cultural and architectural heritage often remain underutilized despite their potential to contribute to local development and tourism. Pedgaon, a historic settlement in Maharashtra, on the banks of river Bhima contains a diverse assemblage of heritage assets including temples, mosques, fortifications, gateways, and cultural landscapes that reflect the region's historical significance. However, inadequate conservation efforts, limited tourism infrastructure, and the absence of an integrated management framework have restricted the effective utilization of these resources. This study assesses the impact of heritage tourism on rural settlements through the case of Pedgaon, examining the relationship between heritage conservation, tourism development, and socio-economic growth. The research employs a mixed-method approach involving heritage documentation, site surveys, mapping, stakeholder interactions, and literature review. The findings indicate that heritage tourism can serve as a catalyst for rural development by generating livelihood opportunities, improving infrastructure, strengthening cultural identity, and encouraging community participation. At the same time, challenges such as inadequate visitor facilities, lack of awareness, environmental risks, and fragmented governance structures hinder tourism growth. The study concludes that a heritage-led tourism framework supported by community involvement and institutional coordination can contribute to the sustainable development of Pedgaon while safeguarding its cultural significance. The findings provide a replicable model for similar rural heritage settlements across Maharashtra.

Keywords: Community Participation, Cultural Heritage, Heritage Management, Heritage Tourism, Pedgaon, Rural Development.

1. Introduction

Heritage tourism is an important approach for promoting cultural preservation and development, particularly within rural settlements possessing significant historic and cultural assets. Historic village of Pedgaon has temples, mosques, forts, historical warfare structures, traditional settlement patterns, and cultural practices that reflect centuries of social and architectural evolution. However, many such settlements remain un-recognized despite their potential to contribute to regional tourism and economic development.

Pedgaon, located in Shrigonda Taluka of Ahilyanagar District, Maharashtra, on the banks of River Bhima is a historic settlement characterized by a diverse architectural value of

heritage resources, including Dharmaveergad Fort, temples, mosques, gateways, and traditional village fabric. While some structures have received formal recognition, many heritage assets remain inadequately documented and excluded from established tourism circuits. Consequently, opportunities for conservation, visitor engagement, and local livelihood generation remain underutilized. Tourists who visit the area consider this to be a short term visit mostly due to the lack of tourism infrastructure, hence resulting in lesser revenue generation.

This study evaluates the impact of heritage tourism on rural settlements through the case of Pedgaon. The research examines how heritage assets can contribute to economic growth, social development, cultural preservation, and infrastructure enhancement while identifying the challenges associated with heritage-led development.



Fig. 1. Visual of the Lakshmi Narayan Temple showing exterior form (Under ASI Conservation)

Source: Clicked by Author, 2025

2. Literature Review

Heritage tourism refers to travel motivated by an interest in experiencing places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past. Scholars have increasingly recognized heritage tourism as a tool for cultural conservation, economic diversification, community development and revenue generation.

Research indicates that heritage tourism can generate employment opportunities, improve local infrastructure, stimulate small businesses, and encourage the preservation of traditional crafts and cultural practices. Community

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participation is considered essential to ensure that tourism benefits local residents while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Studies on heritage settlements such as Pabal, Mangalvedha and Chanderi in Maharashtra demonstrate the importance of integrated planning approaches that combine conservation, visitor management, stakeholder participation, and sustainable tourism strategies for a settlement scale. These examples provide valuable lessons for rural settlements such as Pedgaon, where heritage resources remain largely underutilized despite possessing significant tourism potential.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a mixed-method research approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods. Primary data were collected through site visits, heritage documentation, photographic surveys, condition assessments, stakeholder interactions, and village-level observations. Secondary data were obtained from academic literature, archival records, government publications, Archaeological Survey of India reports, and previous research studies.

The methodology involved:

- Documentation of tangible and intangible heritage assets.
- Mapping of heritage structures and tourism resources.
- Assessment of tourism potential and visitor accessibility.
- Analysis of socio-economic and cultural conditions.
- Evaluation of challenges affecting conservation and tourism development.

The collected information was analyzed to understand the relationship between heritage resources and rural development opportunities.

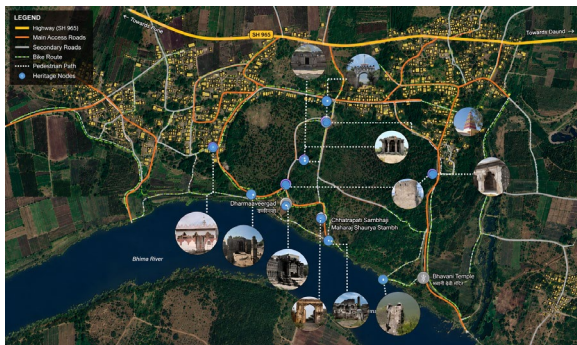


Fig. 2. Roads and Connectivity Map of Pedgaon Showing Regional Access Routes, Internal Road Network, and Heritage Destinations with respect to tourism

Source: Prepared by the author using satellite imagery and field survey data, 2026.

4. Heritage Resources of Pedgaon

Pedgaon possesses a unique combination of religious, military, and cultural heritage resources. The settlement contains historic temples, mosques, gateways, fortifications, water structures, and traditional settlement patterns that collectively contribute to its heritage significance.

Among the prominent heritage assets are Dharmaveergad Fort, Laxmi Narayan Temple, Baleshwar Temple, Mallikarjun

Temple, Rameshwar Temple, and historic mosques within the settlement. The presence of the Bhima River further enhances the cultural landscape and contributes to the historic identity of the village.

The coexistence of multiple religious and architectural traditions within a single settlement provides Pedgaon with the potential to emerge as a distinctive heritage tourism destination. However, several structures remain undocumented, inadequately maintained, and disconnected from formal tourism networks. The implications of the limited tourism impacts the heritage core area but stays devoid of the settlement area.

5. Impact of Heritage Tourism on Rural Settlements

A. Economic Impact

Heritage tourism can generate direct and indirect economic benefits for rural communities. Increased visitor activity creates opportunities for local employment, homestays, food services, handicrafts, transportation, and guided tourism experiences. Heritage-based economic activities can diversify rural income sources and reduce dependence on agriculture.

For Pedgaon, tourism development has the potential to stimulate local entrepreneurship while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities linked to cultural and heritage resources.

Table 1
Proposed community participation framework for heritage tourism revenue generation

Strategy for Villagers for Revenue Generation	
Activity	Could be managed by
Homestays	Village households
Guided walks	Local youth
Boating	Village tourism cooperative
Food court	Women's SHGs
Souvenir stalls	Local artisans
Heritage festivals	Village committee
Parking management	Gram Panchayat

Source: Analyzed and proposed by the Author, 2026

B. Social Impact

Heritage tourism encourages community participation and strengthens social cohesion by promoting collective responsibility toward cultural resources. Local residents become active stakeholders in conservation efforts, interpretation activities, and tourism management.

In Pedgaon, community involvement can contribute to improved awareness regarding heritage conservation while fostering a sense of pride and ownership among residents.

C. Cultural Impact

One of the most significant benefits of heritage tourism is the preservation and promotion of cultural identity. Tourism can support traditional festivals, rituals, storytelling practices, and local knowledge systems by creating broader public appreciation of cultural heritage.

Pedgaon's temples, mosques, religious traditions, and historical narratives represent valuable cultural resources that can be preserved through carefully managed tourism initiatives.

D. Infrastructure Impact

Tourism development often leads to improvements in infrastructure, including roads, signage, public amenities, interpretation facilities, and visitor services. Such improvements benefit both tourists and local residents.

In Pedgaon, enhanced accessibility, visitor facilities, information systems, and public spaces can improve the overall quality of life while strengthening the settlement's tourism appeal.

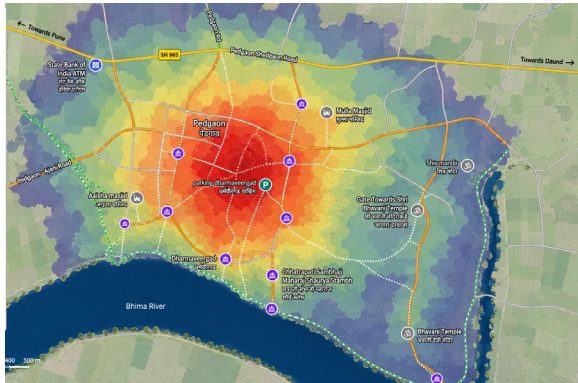


Fig. 3. Isochrone map illustrating visitor accessibility to heritage assets, in Pedgaon

Source: Prepared by Author using GIS Network Analysis, 2026

E. Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its tourism potential, Pedgaon faces several challenges including inadequate conservation measures, limited tourism infrastructure, insufficient funding, weak institutional coordination, and low public awareness regarding heritage value.

Environmental concerns, including river-related risks and weathering of historic structures, further threaten the long-term preservation of heritage assets. The absence of comprehensive management frameworks restricts coordinated conservation efforts.

However, these challenges also present opportunities. Heritage documentation, community participation, tourism circuit development, interpretation centres, cultural events, and stakeholder collaboration can transform Pedgaon into a model of heritage-led rural development. The integration of heritage conservation with tourism planning can contribute to both cultural preservation and economic growth.



Fig. 4. Community marketplace reflecting local economic and cultural activities in Pedgaon for tourism

Source: Photograph by the author, 2026

6. Conclusion

Heritage tourism possesses significant potential to contribute to the sustainable development of rural settlements. The case of Pedgaon demonstrates that heritage resources can function as catalysts for economic growth, social development, cultural preservation, and infrastructure improvement when supported by appropriate management strategies.

The study highlights the importance of integrated planning approaches that combine conservation, tourism development, community participation, and institutional support. Through strategic interventions and stakeholder collaboration, Pedgaon can emerge as a heritage destination that balances conservation objectives with rural development goals.

The findings further suggest that the framework developed for Pedgaon can serve as a replicable model for similar heritage settlements across Maharashtra and other regions of India.

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