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Proposing Tribal Heritage Protection through Ethnotourism: A Study on Disom Sendra Festival of Ajodhya Hills in India

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ABSTRACT

From the urge for a deeper understanding of the tribal culture, ethnotourism has grown worldwide. Ethnotourists are motivated to explore, investigate, and experience both tangible and intangible heritages of the tribal world among which hunting festivals worldwide draw considerable attention for environmental concerns. This paper is an attempt to analyze the contestation of the various issues in one of such festivals called 'Disom Sendra'. This hunting festival is celebrated amidst Ajodhya hills, situated in the Puruliya district of West Bengal in India, in view of the dissonance between its cultural and environmental utility. The 'Disom Sendra' of the Santal community is now on the verge of extinction due to continuous protests by the so-called environmentalists. Attributes associated with this ethnic festival are almost wiped out from the festival ritual list and therefore endangered, despite its tremendous ethnic value. Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) has been attempted to address the status of its heritage and tourism value. Considering the issues of authenticities, relevant attributes have been taken into consideration to identify the priorities and non-priorities that facilitate the policymakers and planners to coordinate among the stakeholders to protect the tribal heritage. The findings may facilitate designing strategies to develop the 'Disom Sendra' as an ethnotourism event satisfying the urges of habitat, economy, and society from sustainability perspectives.

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KEYWORDS: tribal; ethnic; environmental; dissonance; authenticity; sustainability

INTRODUCTION

The protection of tribal heritage is one of the key issues concerning social sustainability. Festivals are always a key to preserving the intangible cultural heritage of an indigenous society. The Disom Sendra festival of Ajodhya hills, annually celebrated in the month of May (during the auspicious event of Budhha Purnima), is one of such festivals that not only play a key role in retaining the Santals' legacy as a hunting tribe but

also provide a platform of cultural celebration in the form of dance, drama, and faith-centric rituals. Hunting is considered as an integral part of the tribal culture all over the world since time immemorial. In contemporary societies, many tribal communities have gradually adopted the modern lifestyle along with evolving economic activities but still, in different parts of the world, hunting is celebrated as a festival by the tribal community at least once a year as an age-old tradition that strengthened the bonding between the people of their community [1].

The research problem arises from the fact that instead of the preservation of indigenous culture being a matter of prime concern while attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), hunting festivals for its very nature draws much criticism from the standpoint of environmental protection. The objection to hunting is raised [2] due to:

- the negative impact on the ecology affecting wildlife,
- conflict in social acceptability; instead, hunting is associated with respective subcultures as one of their distinctive cultural traditions.

In Ajodhya hills, the conservationists have raised their voices from different corners to convince the local government to ban the hunting procession, which is otherwise an integral part of this festival. Contestation arises thereby between the paradigm of tradition and the paradigm of conservation, which is little addressed in the contemporary pieces of literature. It has been argued that hunting should be accepted as one particular form of cultural tourism as it is deeply-rooted in indigenous cultures, and an authentic cultural experience is gained by the tourists [2]. Apparently, hunting and sustainability conflict with each other, but hunting festivals of indigenous communities through innovation may serve as a sustainable tourism product. This research article aims to address this research gap on such innovations with a special focus on the ethnotourism potentials of the Disom Sendra festival of Ajodhya hills in the Puruliya district of West Bengal (India).

According to a popular Santal belief, the Ajodhya hill region (Figure 1) was the original abode of the Santal tribe. Later, their settlements spread all over the eastern India. *Jaher Than* is the sacred grove where Santals worship two giant Sal trees, while their totemistic culture leads to preserving various living objects, considering them as sacred. The pro-nature attitude among the Santal tribe, as manifested in their *genre de vie*, has been neglected by the conservationists from the urban elite class for which Santals are facing challenges to celebrate their traditional rituals due to the intervention of so-called environmentalists, according to whom it is a 'must be banned festival' since it depletes the forest species. The restriction imposed on various ritualistic events not only affects the glory and vanity of the tribal festival that draws tourist but also raises extreme annoyance in the ethnic mindset of the Santals, who are refusing to discontinue their age-old festival and tradition. The objectives of this study are:

- To understand the recent challenges faced by the traditional hunting festival of the Santal tribe.
- To highlight the scope of innovations in the ritualistic practice of the hunting festival for sustainable tourism development.
- To evaluate the strategic role of ethnotourism to protect the tribal heritage of ceremonial hunting while exploring its economic and socio-cultural viabilities.

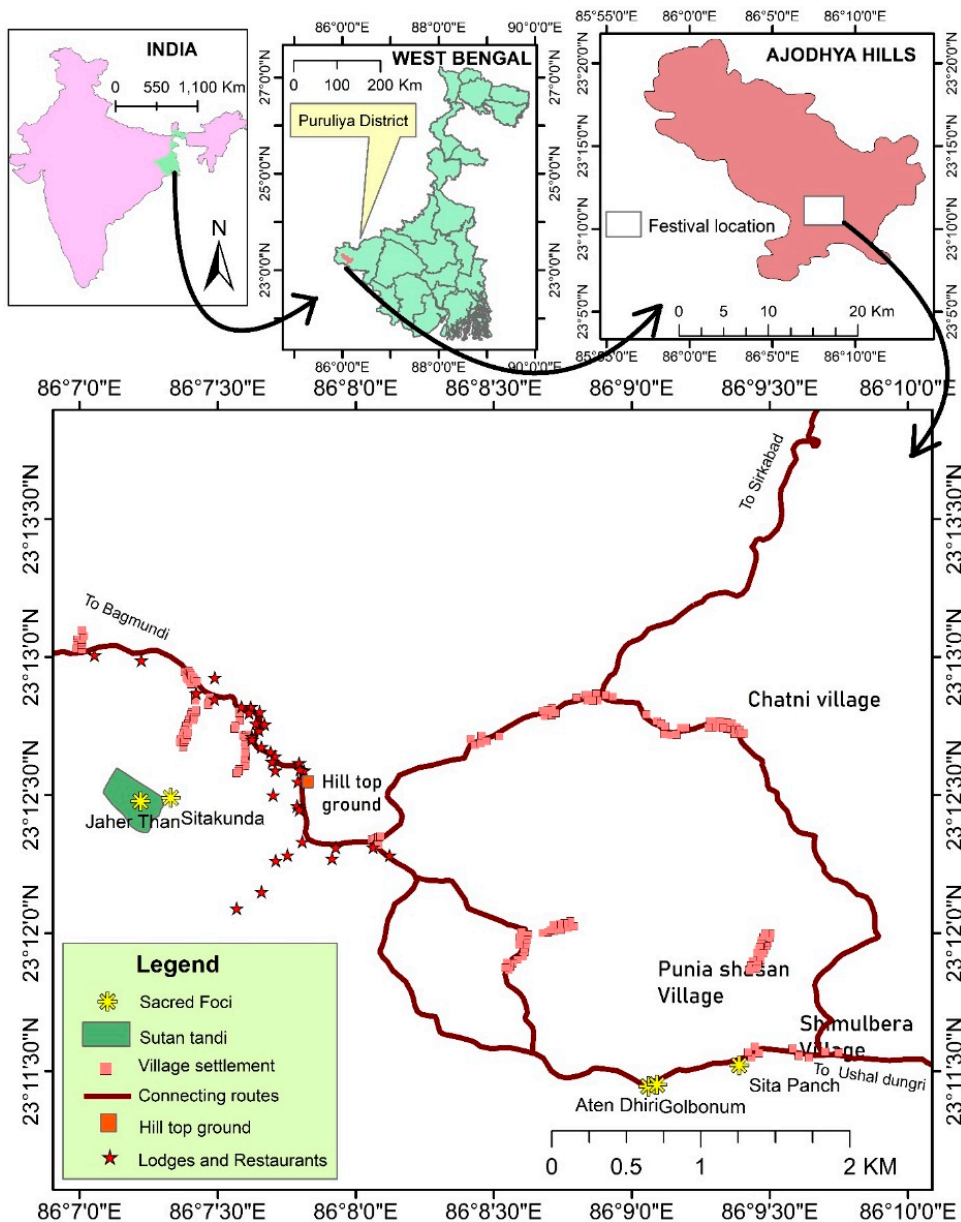


Figure 1. Location map of the study area. Source: prepared by the authors.

Theoretical Framework and Background of the Study

From a theoretical standpoint, the study concerns the emotional geography of the Santals. Recognizing emotion is highly relevant to geography's engagement while recognizing and validating relationship to

place [3]. The Ajodhya hills are such a space for the Santals, which is emotionally constituted and charged as the habitat of their annual performance. Performance is a geographical act, a powerful emotional way of shaping social life from which spatiality of feelings emerge [4]. The narratives associated with the hunting festival of the Santals highlight the interconnectedness of the community and the sacred identity of the Ajodhya hills since emotive narratives informed by cultural habit and experience as connective tissues link people's emotions to a place [5]. As recent researches in emotional geographies pay more attention to marginalized communities and disintegrated topics [6], the analysis of the physical performance of the hunting rituals of the Santals could explore the research gap on human engagement with powerful cultural places.

The Santals are one of the most primitive tribes of India belonging to the Proto-Australoid group who are presently concentrated in the eastern and south-eastern parts of India, primarily in the states of Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, West Bengal, Assam, and Tripura [7]. They are also found in the SAARC countries like Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh. The Santals are primarily hunting and gathering tribe at their initial phase of societal development. However, later like many other tribes of India, they adopted agriculture as their main occupation. Magh Sim, Baha, Sendra, Mak More, Arok Sim, Hariar Sim, Karam, Iri-Gudli, Dasai, Got Sim, Saharai, Janthar, Sakrat, and Bheja-Tung, etc., are the important festivals that are celebrated throughout the year among which, Disom Sendra and Bheja-Tung are the two major festivals that reflect their traditional way of life depending upon hunting.

The word '*Disom*' is representative of the Santal habitat, and '*Sendra*' is representative of their inquiries on various aspects in the assembly of *Majhi* (head), *Paranik* (lawyer), *Dihri* (priest), *Jogmajhi* (pioneer/guide of the youths) and *Godet* (the messenger). '*Disom Sendra*' is a representation from different *Disoms* to satisfy *Sendra* (search for) and obtain the verdicts on problems affecting tribal life. The problems that are unsettled in *Atu* (Village level), *Pir* (Panchayat level), *Muluk* (block level), *Tallat* (sub-division level), *Zila* (district level), *Panat* (state level) are brought for the consideration of *Diheri* (supreme priest), who has been selected by their national level organization called Bharat Jakat Majhi Paragana Mahal [8]. Therefore, *Sendra* is thereby practiced for the search of the root of culture in the broader sense, providing a platform for social justice on various serious issues relating to their social well-being. The Santals conceive the meaning of *Sendra* not only in the context of the search for animals to hunt but also extends to discoveries of forest edibles and medicinal plants as the legacy of their original hunting-gathering economy [9]. To prove himself a "*Herel Hor*" (real man), every Santal man has been prescribed by traditional society to participate as a hunter in the Disom Sendra festival once in a life [10]. As a national-level festival of Santals, the tribe scattered in different parts of the country and abroad comes every year to attend this auspicious occasion at the Ajodhya hills.

Ethnotourism as Socio-Economic Booster for a Community

Ethno-tourism is ideally suited to community-based tourism ventures that pose both economic and social value [11], motivated by visitors' search for exotic cultural experiences [12]. The economic value arises from the multiplier effects of tourism as the ethnotourism products are exclusively owned and managed by the locals, and thereby, the drain of capital from the local economy could be greatly reduced. As ethnotourism is dependent upon the utilization of indigenous knowledge and values and requires very little capital investment and technological input it is possible to encash its benefits directly percolating to a community. It provides a unique opportunity for the local people to participate in the mainstream tourism industry and develop management skills. Income generated through ethnotourism could be channeled to facilitate community development and fulfil societal needs such as in the field of education, health, and water supply [13], as well as poverty alleviation and self-reliance [14,15]. Ethnotourism relies on the display of indigenous culture and lifestyle to guests from different cultures and lifestyle backgrounds. Showcasing one's own cultural uniqueness is the objective relating to increasing the pride of the community and respect for one's own culture. Moreover, it facilitates cross-cultural interaction and builds greater societal understanding and tolerance [16].

Hunting Festival as a Product of Ethnotourism around the World

Ethnotourism has evolved worldwide as an instrument to protect tribal heritage from extinction. From an ethnotourism perspective, an extensive literature review on distinguished hunting festivals of the world has been conducted before designing the field study, e.g.,

- a. '*Hista*', a festivity resulting from blending the indigenous and catholic tradition of the Kichwa people of Ecuador. It is one of the world-famous ethnotourism attractions. Among various *Hista* celebrated, *Lansa Hista* of the Sarayaku community is the most popular one [17], which has been modified so that animal killing has been minimized instead, the spirit of hunting among the community could be maintained. Such compromise within the cultural realm of traditional society is unique and applicable to re-organizing hunting festivals of the Indian tribes for ethnotourism marketing.
- b. The Mandyeng festival is celebrated in Nigeria during the rainy season when sowing for crops begins. The festival draws ethnotourists for music performances with traditional instruments, especially their Juu pipes (traditional flute). Hunting is an integral part of the rituals practiced by tribal people, along with amusement activities like horse racing, dancing, etc. [1] that satisfy the demand of ethnotourists. Various tribal festivities of India associated with hunting have a similar scope to be explored for ethnotourism development.

- c. Falconry, the Eagle hunting festival of Western Mongolia, which has been enlisted by UNESCO as an intangible cultural heritage otherwise became the depleting practice of Altai Kazakh, once representative of their political power, social position, and divine symbolism. After it has been recognized as an intangible cultural heritage with Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) for humanity, the Golden Eagle Festival has emerged as one of the major attractions in Silk Road tourism [18].
- d. The famous hunting procession of Chenchus (a tribe of south-eastern India) with bows and arrows celebrating the marriage ceremony of Lord Narasimha in India also attracts the ethnotourists from all over the world for which various initiatives have been taken by the Ministry of Tourism of Andhra Pradesh Government for its sustainable management that effectively boost the local economy [19].

Data Collection and Methods

After a thorough review of the literature on regional and global contexts, a field survey has taken place. The method adopted for the field survey is ethnographic. Instead of attempting to generate any binary data, a modified Likert scale has been applied as the performance and importance measuring scale to satisfy the sampling requirement [20] for Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA) [21]. Interaction with the participants of the festival held at the *Sutan Tandi* ground to yield data. It is the place on the hilltop where all the Santal participants are assembled to enjoy the cultural events after the hunting ceremony and spend the night there under the open sky. A total of 241 participants were interviewed on various aspects of the festival using the performance and importance scale that ranges from 1 to 5, explaining 'insignificant' to 'very high'. The data on the 'performance' are collected based on the present status of the particular attribute, and the data on the 'importance' of the particular attribute are representative of its tourism value about the sustenance of the tradition of the festival. A total of fifteen attributes (variables) have been identified from *Sutan Tandi* during *Law-Bir-Bicy* (the assembly for justice) and from Shimulbera. In this tribal village, Sendra Bonga (the forest god) has been worshipped.

There are two ways to assess the effectiveness through the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) model. One is a direct measure, and the second is an indirect measure. In the direct measurement method [22–24], the Likert Scale is applied for this study to collect data regarding both performance and importance. It is noteworthy to mention that many researchers advocate for the use of direct method to avoid controversies on the use of statistical methods like multiple regression analysis [25,26], partial correlation analysis [27,28], and simple regression analysis [29,30] used in indirect measurement method. In the direct measurement method, all the scores are summed up and averaged for each attribute (variable) using any convenient statistical software. This function is applied to calculate the mean of both performance and importance for

each individual attribute that is taken into consideration in this study. Apart from the computation of mean and standard deviation, dependent sample *t*-tests have been conducted for a gap analysis between the performance and importance of each and every attribute [24] using IBM SPSS version 23. A dependent sample *t*-test has been attempted primarily to conduct a comparison of the observations (mean scores) of a first set of items (attributes in the 'performance' variable) with those of a second set of items (attributes in 'importance' variable) on same sample population to determine whether the significant change have occurred or not [31]. The '*t*' value of those attributes has been considered for analysis, which is statistically significant at a 95% confidence level [22]. Importance Performance Grid with attribute ratings (scores) visualizes the priority aspects for future planning and sustainable management of the Disom Sendra festival.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The hunting festival of Ajodhya hills has an incredible role in the social and cultural life of Santals. The following attributes represent the arena where tribal interest and tourism interest interact:

- **Worship of *Sendra Bonga*:** *Sendra Bonga* (Figure 2A) is the tribal goddess who possesses ultimate control of wildlife and forest. The rituals of the festival begin with the worship of the goddess by *Dihri*, the supreme priest of the community with *mantra* (chanting) and *bali* (sacrificial ritual) for obtaining permission to enter the forest for hunting. According to magical belief, entering the forest without the permission of the deity leads to disaster.
- ***Jaher Than* worship before going for Sendra:** *Jaher Than* is a sacred grove for Santals accommodating *Marang Buru* (male god represented by Sal tree), *Jaher Era* (female god represented by Mahua tree), *Moreko-Turuiko* (assembly of associate gods and goddesses functioning for the well-being of Santal society), *Majhi Bonga* (ancestral god) and *Sima Bonga* (protector deity).
- **Sita Panch pilgrimage:** It is believed that Sita, the heroine of the Indian Epic Ramayana with her husband Sri Rama, once stayed in the forest of Ajodhya (West Bengal). Sita Panch is the footprint of Sita sculptured over a rock surface (Figure 2B); thereby for the cultural tourist, it is a place of reverence and manifestation of communal harmony since Sita is a non-tribal Hindu deity. As a part of the pilgrimage during the festivity, Santals visit the two important mythological places, i.e., Sitakunda and Sita Panch, which represent their contact with Pan-Indian culture, thereby pulling the cultural tourists, if vividly explained to them. Both sites are very prestigious for the Santals, facilitating their claim as the most primitive tribe in this place.
- **Sitakunda oriented rituals:** Sitakunda (Figure 2C) is the magical water body for the Santals who used to take soils and water from it with the

magical belief of fertility of women folk and agricultural field. The auspicious soil is also used while making new houses as a symbol of good fortune.

- Rituals of plucking flowers, namely mararbha and champabha: While returning home, the hunters collect a bunch of Champabha and Mararbha flowers for their wives to express love to the beloved one [32].
- Ritual of bringing iron bangle: As a symbol of insecurity with mental preparation for losing their life, Santali men used to bring the iron bangles of their wives as customs during hunting expeditions. Further, it is a psychological booster for making hunter more conscious of protecting their own life during their expeditions in the forest of Ajodhya hills.
- Magical rites in *Golbunum*: *Golbunum* is a sacred site at Shimulbera where the tribes assemble under the sacred Champa tree in expectation of falling a flower at least. It is an item to gift the life partner after returning home with the magical belief that it will sustain the love between the couple in the future course of life. It is noteworthy that the word *Bunum* means termite mound, considered a magical object situated at the base of a sacred Champabha tree. While making round (*Gol*) of the tree, controlling breath, and whistling thrice, if the Champa flower falls, it is admitted that the participants of the ritual attain extremely good faith for the future (Figure 2D).
- Worshipping *Aten Dhiri*: A rock structure is worshiped on this occasion at the sacred site *Aten Dhiri* (Figure 2E). According to the myth, the rock predicts the immediate future of hunting that could take place in different parts of the hills. The word *Dhiri* means rock, and *Aten* means to listen. *Aten Dhiri* is a magical rock that listens and notices the distribution of hunting groups with their prey during the Disom Sendra. The devotees keep a small branch on the top of the sacred rock, believing that the rock would transmit the information to them in this context.
- Singrai dance-drama Performance: An educative cum recreational event (Figure 2F) for Santals with the objective of teaching lessons of life to the young generation, including the conception necessary to run conjugal life. One of the primary aims of various dance-drama activities on this occasion is to offer sex education for the youth so that they can lead a prosperous family life in the future.
- Arrangement of Dunder dance programme: An ethnic dance form that imparts a message of brotherhood and harmony.
- Use of traditional instruments: Tamak, Regra, Dhak, Tundah, Ghai, Kartal, and Thayang (Figure 2G) played by the tribal participants are among the traditional instruments very attractive for the ethnotourist.
- Assembly called *Law-Bir-Bicy*: The *Law-Bir-Bicy* assembly (Figure 2H) is considered the supreme court of the Santals [33], thereby attracting cultural tourists.

- Medicinal plant collection: Collection by participants during the festival is less now, but such items are sold as souvenirs by locals (Figure 2I) during the festival who are used to collect the plants throughout the year.
- Symbolic Hunting: The practice of hunting is not for the tool but to retain their ancestral legacy. Hunting procession with weapons is the prime attraction for visitors.
- Archery sporting activity during the festival: Boosting age-old tribal practice as an emblem of tribal sovereignty is another event that impresses tourists.



Figure 2. Rituals associated with *Disom Sendra* festival and sacred foci, (A) Place of worship of *Sendra Bonga* god, (B) *Sita Panch*, footprint of *Sita* cognized on a rock thereby, (C) Collecting sacred water by the Santals from the spring *Sitakunda*, (D) Ritual at *Golbunum*, (E) Worshipping *Aten Dhiri*, (F) *Singrai* dance performance during the festival, (G) Traditional instruments for amusement, (H) Gathering of Santals in *Law-Bir-Bicy*, *Sutan Tandi* ground, (I) Selling of medicinal plants by the locals during the festival. Source: photographs captured by the authors.

The festivities depict the scope and opportunities of ethnotourism development centering the *Disom Sendra* festival of *Ajodhya hills* and can play the role of saviour protecting tribals' intangible heritage. The quantitative analysis through the *IPA* model reveals the top five attributes that have lodged the high mean scores as an indication of better performance status in the *Disom Sendra* festival among the fifteen selected attributes. These are "Social problem discussion and judgement

through *Law-Bir-Bicy*” ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.73$), “visit to Sitakunda for spiritual purpose” ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 0.70$), “traditional musical instrument for recreation” ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.88$), “worship of forest god *Sendra Bonga*” ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.06$), and “forest centric ritual at *Golbunum*” ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.39$) (Table 1). According to the view of festival participants, the five most important attributes (based on importance) to sustain and maintain the authenticity of *Disom Sendra* festival as ethnotourism object are “worship of *Sendra Bonga*” ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.61$), “Social problem discussion and judgement through *Law-Bir-Bicy*” ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.54$), “hunting as a symbolic expression of ancient culture” ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.69$), “Singrai dance drama performance” ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.81$), and “use of traditional musical instruments for recreation” ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 1.03$).

Two important attributes of the festival might be considered as matters of future concern from the standpoint of their present level of performance, namely “hunting as a symbolic expression of ancient culture” ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.25$) and “Singrai dance-drama performance” ($M = 2.67$, $SD = 1.13$) on account of their immense importance from ethnotourism as well heritage preservation perspective. The importance score (mean) of these aforementioned attributes are 4.51 and 4.31, respectively, ranking them as the third and fourth important attributes of the festival.

Table 1. Analysis of performance and importance scale responses for *Disom Sendra* festival.

Serial Number	Key Attributes	Performance ^a Mean (SD)	Importance ^b Mean (SD)
1	Worship of forest God <i>Sendra Bonga</i>	3.92 (1.06)	4.66 (0.61)
2	<i>Jaher than</i> worship before going for <i>Sendra</i>	2.44 (1.18)	3.43 (1.29)
3	Visit and Worship of ‘Sita Panch’	3.15 (1.44)	2.94 (1.59)
4	Visit the spring Sitakunda and collect water and soil as sacred objects	4.32 (0.70)	3.39 (1.08)
5	Medicinal plant collection and exploration	1.81 (1.05)	3.80 (1.30)
6	Ritual of bringing wife’s iron bangle	2.24 (1.20)	2.02 (0.97)
7	Forest-centric ritual at the <i>Golbunum</i>	3.38 (1.39)	3.70 (1.03)
8	Animistic ritual at <i>Aten Dhiri</i> , holy place	3.14 (1.57)	3.27 (1.24)
9	Singrai dance-drama Performance	2.67 (1.13)	4.31 (0.81)
10	Arrangement of the <i>Dunger Dance</i> programme during the festival	1.47 (0.61)	3.84 (0.74)
11	Use of traditional musical instruments for recreation	4.10 (0.88)	4.29 (1.03)
12	Social problem discussion and judgement through <i>Law-Bir-Bicy</i>	4.41 (0.73)	4.58 (0.54)
13	Rituals of Plucking symbolic love flowers namely <i>mararbha</i> and <i>champabha</i>	1.96 (0.98)	3.74 (1.31)
14	Hunting as symbolic expression of ancient culture	2.61 (1.25)	4.51 (0.69)
15	Archery sporting activity during the festival	1.11 (0.32)	3.99 (0.84)

Data Source: Ethnographic survey by the authors, 2022. ^a Measured on a scale of 1 = insignificant to 5 = very high; ^b Measured on a scale of 1 = insignificant to 5 = very high.

Meanwhile, some attributes are already in the endangered stage, and there arises the need to concentrate on mitigation to maintain the glory of the festival. The attributes which are already on the verge of extinction, as revealed by the higher negative “*t*” value (Table 2) are “Archery during the festival” (−43.26), “Arrangement of dunger dance programme” (−34.88), and symbolic hunting procession (−21.48). The position of each aforementioned attribute in a particular quadrant of the graph (Figure 3) indicates the immediate necessity to restore them to maintain the pride of the Sendra festival of Ajodhya hills. Meanwhile, these kinds of attributes have immense tourism value, as revealed from the result (importance score), and might be appropriate boosters in this context.

Table 2. Derivation of ‘*t*’ value for gap analysis between performance and importance.

Serial Number	Key Attributes	Significance Test (<i>t</i> value)
1	Worship of forest God <i>Sendra Bonga</i>	−9.98*
2	<i>Jaher than</i> worship before going for <i>Sendra</i>	−8.15*
3	Visit and Worship of ‘Sita Panch’	2.14*
4	Visit the spring Sitakunda and collect water and soil as sacred objects	10.89*
5	Medicinal plant collection and exploration	−17.13*
6	Ritual of bringing wife’s iron bangle	2.94*
7	Forest-centric ritual at the <i>Golbunum</i>	−3.84*
8	Animistic ritual at <i>Aten Dhiri</i> , holy place	−1.00
9	Singrai dance-drama Performance	−16.62*
10	Arrangement of Dunder Dance programme during the festival	−34.88*
11	Use of traditional musical instruments for recreation	−1.85
12	Social problem discussion and judgement through <i>Law-Bir-Bicy</i>	−2.84*
13	Rituals of Plucking symbolic love flowers namely <i>mararbha</i> and <i>champabha</i>	−15.86*
14	Hunting as symbolic expression of ancient culture	−21.48*
15	Archery sporting activity during the festival	−43.26*

* Statistically significant at 95% confidence level.

It is noteworthy to mention that once the forest had a lot of terrible creatures for which Santal men attended hunting ceremonies carrying the iron bangle of their wives (attribute 6) from the magical belief that it would protect them from the causalities and life threat after entering the forest. At present, as those creatures do not exist in the forest, the urge to “bring the iron bangle of the wife” ($M = 2.24$ in performance) has reduced, and since it is not an appealing event for tourists, the importance score is less ($M = 2.02$ in importance). This is why the particular attribute falls in the low-priority zone. Similarly, for the effect of modernization in Santal society, the appeal of age-old rituals is diminishing as evident from comparatively lower importance and performance scores of *Jaher Than* Worship (attribute 2) and Flower Plucking Ritual (attribute 13). The attributes having both less performance and less importance values may

not persist in the long run and become extinct in due course, but the attributes having low performance with higher importance, immediately require planning for protection and sustenance as it reveals greater heritage value as well as greater attractiveness to the visitor and because of this, it can help to survive the festival in future. Figure 3 identifies the attributes (i.e., attribute number 5, 9, 10, 14, 15) falls in quadrant I, requires immediate attention of the planners engaged in ethnotourism development while as attribute 2, 6 and 13 falls in the quadrant of “low priority” [21], their survival depend on the wish of the community and may be a subject of discussion in Law-Bir-Bicy.

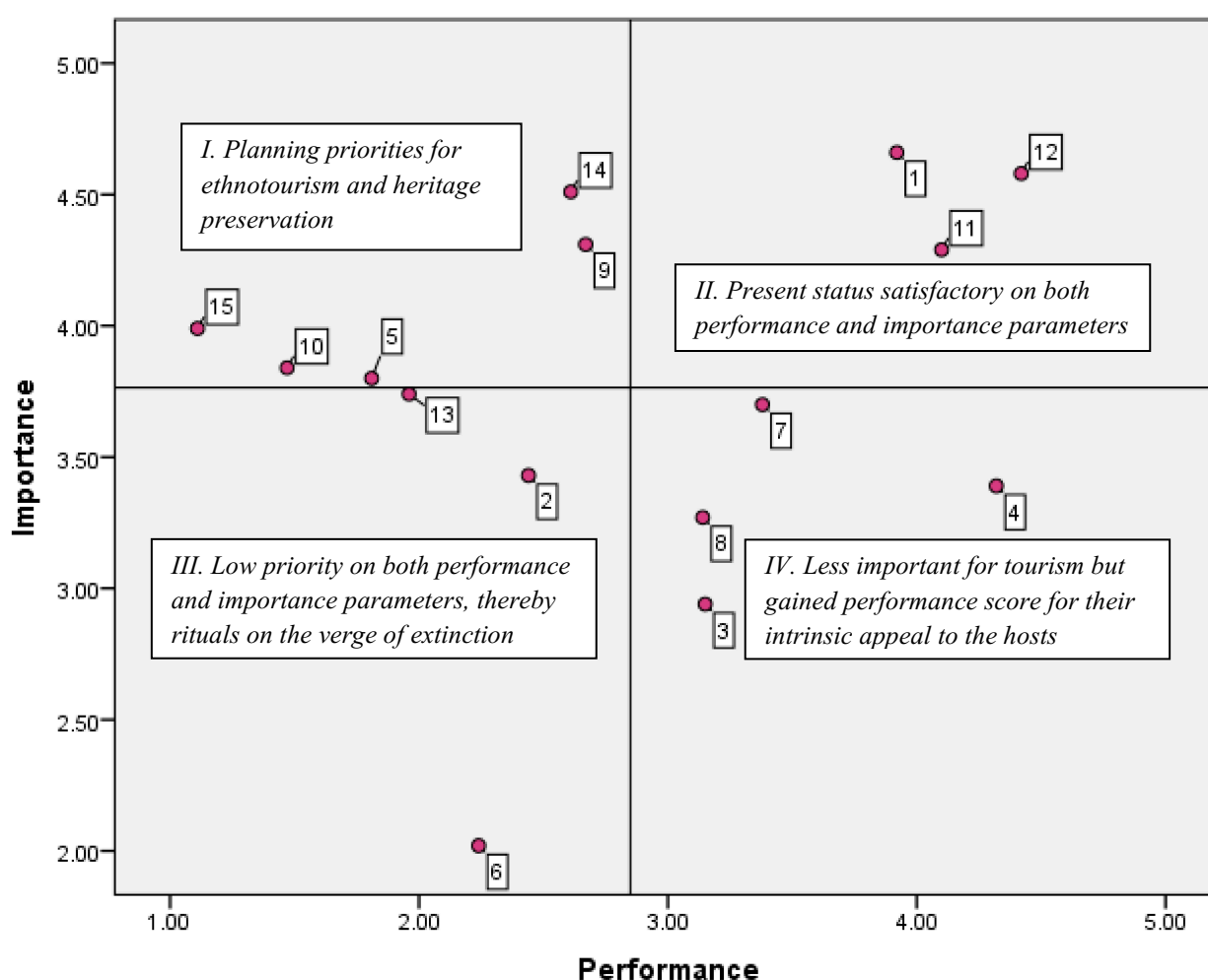


Figure 3. Position of each variable in the quadrant according to its performance and importance scores (mean) relating to the Disom Sendra festival (Source: prepared by the authors).

CONCLUSION: MITIGATING STRATEGIES

People’s participation is necessary to protect any heritage, and Disom Sendra might not be an exception. For sustainable ethnotourism development centering on Disom Sendra, the local Santali people should play the pivotal role of the host, considering tourists as their guests for them. Ethnotourism development might help to look at the festival in a different way by the protesters as it could help to uphold the age-old

culture of the Santal community in a constructive way and bring economic opportunities as well.

In view of the cultural and economic viabilities of the Disom Sendra festival, sustainable planning is necessary with a focus on the following:

- Symbolic hunting could be promoted following the model of the Golden Eagle festival of Mongolia, known for hunting red foxes with the help of trained eagles riding on horses [18]. It is widely accepted that the ethnotourism-oriented nature of the present-day festival is a tribute to the tradition of hunting [34], during which no real hunting takes place at all. About thousands of foreign tourists come to observe the Golden Eagle festival every year, which has boosted the tourism economy of Kazakhstan [35]. Such a measure is essential to modify the status of Disom Sendra from a “festival of killing animals” to a “festival of cultural uniqueness”.
- Dunder dance is another major attraction in which forty to fifty male Santals dance to their traditional songs. This dance form depicts the message of the intimacy of the tribe with nature. Systematic presentation through music and dance is appreciable for ethnotourists.
- Archery competition among tribals could be reintroduced. A stadium was made by the government a few years ago at the hilltop ground where this type of competition could be arranged for the amusement of tourists while protecting the tradition as well.
- Competition to collect medicinal plants may be another innovation that could encourage the younger generations to upgrade their traditional knowledge. An exhibition of the collected items in the venue of *Law-Bir-Bicy* would be a unique experience for the visitors.
- With the active role of the tribal development authority and tourism department together, Singrai dance drama in a modified form can attract a huge number of ethnotourists who love to enjoy folklore. If it is possible to organize the Singrai dance drama as a stage performance, then more troupes will get a chance to showcase their talents that may amuse the ethnotourists gathered on the occasion.
- Conventional hunting procession can be arranged from Shimulbera village to *Jaher Than* ground. With bows and arrows celebrating the tradition of hunting along with the traditional musical instruments like Chenchus of Andhra Pradesh, the Santals of Ajodhya can also rejuvenate their old culture without practical hunting. This type of arrangement should be supported by the local administration so that many tourists from outside come and enjoy the folklore, and the antagonism of Santals on government can be alleviated as well.

Introducing ethnotourism-oriented Disom Sendra will be subject to popular criticism centering on issues of authenticity [36] and commoditization [37] of cultural heritage. Authenticity is a matter of touristic consciousness relating to the desire to enjoy what is pristine. Contaminating contact [38] is another perception that affects authenticity

due to the arrival of visitors in tribal places that are little touched by modernity. The paradox is that while tourist seeks authenticity of varying degrees, i.e., partial to complete, they play an active role in the determination of authenticity bringing their own cultures, experience, preferences, and values [39]. What is perceived as inauthentic due to commoditization may turn into authentic in the course of time [40] for both the guests and the hosts with the notions like “invention of tradition” [41] or “emergent authenticity” [42], which is the antithesis of the idea that the commoditized cultural products are cultural commodities that lost their intrinsic meaning and significance essential to be designated as authentic. On the contrary, the emergence of a tourist market may facilitate the preserve of the cultural tradition, which would otherwise perish [43]. Further studies are encouraged to focus on them specially. The present study could not involve adequate guests’ responses on the demand side and relies on supply-side responses. Such limitations could be addressed in future research with the growth of ethnotourism. The data is cross-sectional and very few tourists are present during the festival that is not promoted yet as a tourist event. Researchers also need to address the scope of SDGS while dealing with such local culture and products with a focus on tourism’s contribution to the protection of ICH. Under such circumstances, ethnotourism development is nothing but a weapon to ensure the survival of Disom Sendra. Because of various challenges and interventions to celebrate this traditional hunting festival of the Santals, encouraging ethnotourism with sustainable perspectives has emerged as the only option to counter the immediate threat of its extinction.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The dataset of the study is available from the authors upon reasonable request.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

PC conceptualized the study, PC and AG designed the methodology, AG and AK investigated and analysed the data, AG wrote the paper with input from all authors.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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