

The Cultural Heritage of Braj, India: Exploring the Synergetic Influence of Nature, Agriculture and Scripture

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ABSTRACT

The paper explores the synergetic influence of nature, agriculture and scripture on the cultural heritage of Braj, situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh, India. In an ethnographic study with historical analysis and ecological assessments, it illustrates how these elements have shaped the cultural heritage of Braj into something unique and remarkable. The historical and mythological importance of the cultural heritage of Braj has been deeply embedded within the collective memory and traditions of the people of the region. Concomitantly, it reflects fruitful communications about natural surroundings, agricultural practices, spiritual texts and socio-cultural celebrations, weaving a tapestry of tales that influence the day-to-day lives in the region. It addresses its unique relation to the socio-cultural and spiritual consciousness, examining the ways in which its beauty is intertwined with its narratives and rituals as seen from the ancient era and deepens understanding into the heritage of Braj and its relevance to sustainable development and cultural preservation by looking into the reflective dynamics among natural, agricultural and scriptural factors connecting the past with the present. Thus, this sophisticated study provides important insights in preserving the rich legacy of Braj in a fast-changing world.

Keywords: *Cultural heritage, Braj, India, Nature, Agriculture, Scripture, Hindu mythology, Spirituality, Krishna pilgrimage, Sustainable development, Ecological balance, Heritage preservation*

1. **Introduction:** Cultural heritage is defined as the collective material and intangible traditions that form the identity and values of a community. In Braj, a region in northern India, this heritage is impacted by the harmonious interaction of natural elements, agricultural practices, and scriptures. The Yamuna river, lakes, ponds, forests, elevated terrains, farming lands, trees, crops, animals, birds along with human beings, generally known as Brajwasi, possess deep cultural importance due to their association with the



Figure 1. Shri Krishna with a Flute (Courtesy of 'Vrindaban - वृंदावन' Facebook Page)

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Received 08 Nov. 2024; Accepted 15 Dec. 2024. Available online: 25 Dec. 2024.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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legends and narratives related to Shri Krishna. Accordingly, nature and agriculture are the lifelines of the region and collectively play an important role in social, cultural and spiritual practices. Scriptures, especially sacred texts of Hindu beliefs that celebrate Krishna's life and teachings, forms the philosophical and spiritual underpinning of its cultural identity. Collectively these elements interact in a harmonious manner to create a vibrant cultural landscape where environmental sustainability, agrarian traditions and distinct and divine life-style anchored in spirituality are deeply intertwined.

The relationship between the people and the land in Braj is far more than a fossil of the past; it is a historical social force forming the identity of the region. Through centuries, this symbiotic relationship has evolved and woven into a rich cultural narrative, deep-rooted in tradition but resiliently adaptable to change. It forms a testament to the profound ways through which the natural environment influences human experience, and vice versa. Moreover, this interconnectedness clearly expresses itself in this region through rich festivals, worships, music, scriptures, spiritual preaching, and cuisine. These cultural practices are very much entwined with nature, agriculture and scripture and play a crucial role in maintaining the unique biodiversity of the region. The synergy between the natural environment and the agricultural livelihoods of the communities, following the traditional texts, sustains both cultural heritage and ecological balance.

1.1. Braj in India: Braj, also known as Vraj, Vrij, Vraja, Braja, Brij or Brijbhumi, is one of the culturally and historically important regions in northern India. It centers on the area of Mathura-Vrindavan of Uttar Pradesh, but also extends to some districts like Hathras, Aligarh, Agra and Etah of Uttar Pradesh and some parts like Palwal and Ballabhgarh of Haryana, Bharatpur of Rajasthan, and Morena of Madhya Pradesh. "The town of Mathura, the centre of Braj, is considered as the birthplace of Lord Krishna and the region around it as his *leela kestra*" (Gupta 36).

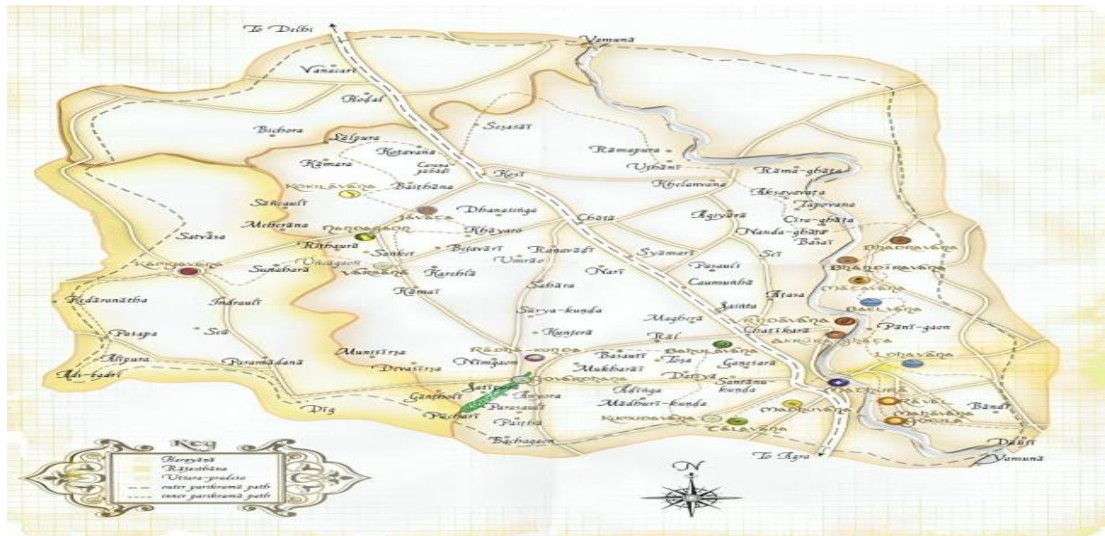


Figure 2. The Map of Braj Bhoomi (Courtesy of The Braj Foundation)

The name ‘Braj’, which is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘व्रज’ (Vraj), signifies ‘an enclosure of herdsmen’ and ‘a place where cows roam.’ This etymology reflects the deep-rooted connection of this region to its traditions. The nature and agriculture of Braj, which includes agricultural fields, sacred orchards, grazing lands, hills, woods, *jhils* (lakes), *kunds*, *sarovars*, canals and the Yamuna river, forms life, contributing to a very distinct cultural landscape. It is also considered the heart of Hindu mythology and spirituality as it represents deep association with Lord Krishna, who was born in Mathura and brought up in Gokul and Nandgaon. As the epicenter of the Krishna pilgrimage, it draws millions of devotees every year, thus affirming its timeless cultural significance.



Figure 3. Maan Sarovar at Radharani Temple (Source: Author)

1.2. Nature and Agriculture in Braj: Ecologically diversified, with cultural and historical significance, this region was shaped by specific natural factors and agricultural

practices. An outline here will deal with the trees, crops, climate, soil, animals and birds of this region to show “how living conditions among inhabitants interplay dynamically with the natural resources” (“Cultural Heritage of Braj: Nature, Agriculture and Social Life” 00:00:01-00:32:03).

- 1.2.1. Climate:** Braj “features a typical north Indian Climate” (UPBTVP 2022). The climate of the region is subtropical steppe (BSH classification), which is characterized by hot and dry summer and a relatively milder winter. The average annual temperature in the region is 30.27°C or 86.49°F, which is a bit warm compared to the national average in India. Precipitation is scarce with around 56.73 mm or 2.23 inches recorded on about 69 days, primarily during the monsoon period. Such climatic conditions impact the farming system and the flora and fauna of the region.
- 1.2.2. Soil:** The soil in Braj, that “is a part of the Indo-Gangetic alluvium” (Lal 9), varies greatly: *Bangar* uplands— *Dumat* and *Bhur* sandy deposits prevail; *Behar* area— mixed with *Kankar*, the soil is less fertile, in particular in the ravines of the Yamuna river. Around lakes and ponds, the soil is known as *Chiknot* or *Bhabra*, which turns fertile loam after periodic flooding or in the rainy season. In general, “the soils have a silty, sandy, and loamy character with a marked presence of sand, clay, *kankar* and *reh*. Such types of soils support different kinds of agricultural activities.
- 1.2.3. Trees:** As depicted in the Padma Purana, Braj had in a number of varieties of trees in twelve forests situated east and west of the Yamuna river— “Madhuvana, Talavana, Kumudavana, Kamyavana, Bahulavana, Vrindavana, and Khadiravana, Mahavana, Bhandiravana, Lohavana, Bhadravana and Baelvana” (Dasa and Dasa 2015). Krishna performed various pastimes in these forests. These add to the ethnic as well as ecological richness of the region. Some of the common species are still found in the region— *ber*, *jamun*, mango, guava, jackfruit, *kadamba*, banyan, *neem*, *peepal*, *pakhad*, *maulsari*, *harsingar*, *shisham*, *khinni*, *kareel* and *babul*. These plants provide shade, beauty, food of various types, fodder of different varieties and medicaments of various kinds.
- 1.2.4. Crops:** Agriculture is the backbone of Braj’s economy. The region grows a variety of crops, categorized into three main seasons: “Kharif crops— paddy, *bajra*, *til*,

arhar, maize, cotton, *jwar*; Rabi crops— wheat, barley, mustard, gram, pea; Zaid crops— *moong*, *urd*” (Krishi Vigyan Kendra Mathura 2018), and various vegetables and flowers. This diversified cropping pattern reflects the adaptability of the farmers to its climatic and soil conditions.

1.2.5. Animals and Birds: Animals and birds in the Braj region include both domesticated and wild varieties. Domesticated animals include cows, bulls, buffaloes, goats, sheep, dogs, donkeys, horses, pigs, and hens, forming an integral part of the agrarian lifestyle. Wild animals like monkeys, *nilgai*, deer, jackals, porcupines, hares, foxes, and baboons along with birds like Indian peafowl, parrot, crane, myna, dove, crow, pigeon, kingfisher, vulture, “*sarus*, *prinia*, shrike, wagtail, pipit, lark, babbler, owl, bee-eater, jacana, barbet, and species of herons” (Vrindavan Today 2021) are seen roaming in the region, signifying ecological diversity.

1.3. Scripture in Braj: The scripture in Braj forms the very backbone of the cultural identity of the region, especially those texts that speak about Shri Krishna, “the most popular incarnation (avatar) of Lord Vishnu” (Gupta 1). Essential texts like “*the Mahabharata, the Bhagavata Purana*” (The Braj Foundation 2024) and the *Padma Purana* describe the existential struggle, teachings, and pastimes of Shri Krishna, forming the foundational elements of devotional practices and the narrative traditions. *The Bhaktamal* celebrates different saints and their intense devotions, giving inspiration to the thriving Bhakti movement in Braj in the medieval period. Astrological literature, as represented by various *Panchangs*, calendars and other books, plays a crucial role in guiding rituals (*Karmakand*), celebrations, and important life events, thus ensuring harmony with celestial cycles. Vedic rituals and spiritual practices are also well-established within the Sanskrit literature, providing enlightenment through seminal works like the *Siddhant Kaumudi* and the *Laghu Siddhant Kaumudi*, which serve as the basis for the grammatical study. These texts serve not only to connect practitioners, particularly spiritual masters, teachers and students, to their spirituality but also to structure the ritualistic, educational, and cultural framework of the region. Collectively, they keep the legacy of the region, interwoven with the pursuit of intellectual excellence and a commitment to socio-spiritual fervor that shapes daily living.

2. Embracing Nature through Devotion and Worship

A large number of rituals, festivals, and other practices have been identified in Braj with the worship of natural elements. The most prominent among them include *Yamuna Chhath*, *Govardhan Puja* and *Gopashtami*. Moreover, the act of planting and preserving sacred trees and plants speaks for itself about the close relationship between devotion and care for the environment.



Figure 4. The People of Braj with their Cows: A Photo from a Temple (Source: Author)

2.1. Yamuna Chhath: *Yamuna Chhath* festival is especially celebrated on *Shasthi* (the sixth day) of *Shukla Paksha* (the bright fortnight) of *Chaitra* month. “It marks the day when Goddess Yamuna descended on the Earth. Hence this day is also known as Yamuna Jayanti or birth anniversary of Goddess Yamuna” (Drik Panchang 2024). However, Yamuna is worshiped as a goddess in Braj throughout the year. A total of 99 rivers like Ganga, Yamuna, Saraswati, Sindhu, Saryu, Gomati etc. are mentioned in *the Rigveda*. Yamuna is mentioned in the *Dasham Mandal* — 1028 *Sukta* of *the Rigveda*. The river Yamuna has been mentioned thrice in it. The people of Braj worship her as the wife of Shri Krishna. They take dips in the river Yamuna, which descended on the earth on this particular day, and offer prayers to it.

2.2. Govardhan Puja: *Govardhan Puja* (worship), also known as *Annakut* or *Annakoot* (meaning ‘mountain of food’), is a festival celebrated in the Braj region on *Pratipada* (the first lunar day) of *Shukla Paksha* (the bright fortnight) in the month of *Kartika*, on the fourth day of *Dipawali*. This day commemorates the event in *the Bhagavata Purana* when Krishna lifted Govardhan Hill to shelter the people of the region from torrential rains. Devotees worship Govardhan Hill, “one of the most prominent features of Braj” (Haberman 2), and prepare a wide variety of vegetarian food to offer to Krishna as a gesture of gratitude. The food offerings, metaphorically representing Govardhan Hill, are made to God as a ritual of remembrance and to renew the faith of devotees in seeking refuge in God.

2.3. Gopashtami: Gopashtami is a festival celebrated on *Ashtami* (the eighth day) of *Shukla Paksha* in the *Kartik* month. The *Go-puja* (cow-worship) is a central ritual of the day. It reflects “the strong historical ties between Krishna and the cow”, as well as reinforces “traditional Hindu concepts concerning the sanctity of the cow” (Lodrick 101). On this day, *Go-puja* and *Krishna Puja* are performed, along with *pradakshina* (circumambulation) to seek blessings for a happy and prosperous life. The festival marks the ceremony when Shri Krishna’s father, Nanda, entrusted him with the responsibility of taking care of his cows. Several devotees visit the *gosala* (cow shelter), where they bathe and clean the cows and the *gosala* itself. The cows are adorned with cloth and ornaments before special rituals are performed by the devotees. Special fodder is given to the cows for their good health, and efforts are made to promote their preservation. Hence,

2.4. Plant and Tree Worship: *Tulsi Puja*, *Kadamba Puja*, *Peepal Puja* and *Bargad Puja* (worship) symbolize a deep spiritual bond with nature. Many people in India associate ‘different trees with various gods and goddesses’ (Tiwari et al 29). *Tulsi Puja* in the households of Braj commemorates the worship of the *Tulsi* plant, because of its significance in the context of Lord Vishnu and Shri Krishna, for both spiritual and medicinal purposes. Devotion and purity are stressed by rituals like *diya* (lamp) lighting, sweets offering, and sapling-planting. Similarly, *Kadamba* trees, which are associated with the childhood *leelas* (activities) of Shri Krishna as depicted in the *Bhagavata Purana*, and *Peepal* and *Bargad* trees, which are associated with Lord Brahma, Lord Vishnu and Lord Mahesh as described in the *Skanda Purana*, the *Bhavishya Purana* and the *Mahabharata*, are considered sacred and are worshiped by devotees who perform rituals and sing hymns to observe their association with these Gods. Such practices are symbolic of faith but also foster ecological awareness and natural heritage preservation.

3. Celebrating Nature through Agricultural Festivals

In Braj, agricultural festivals deeply intermingle with the fabric of culture, glorifying the symphony among nature, farming, scripture and socio-spiritual practices. These festivals go beyond honoring harvests; rather, they acknowledge the elements in nature that preserve life. The following are a few of the most important agricultural festivals:

3.1. Makar Sankranti: *Makar Sankranti* or *Khichidi Sankranti* is India's oldest and most colorful harvest festival, celebrated across the country on *Dwitiya* of *Krishna Paksha* of the *Paush* month. It marks the sun's arrival into the zodiac sign of *makara* (capricorn) as it moves along its celestial route. According to Hindu mythology (*the Mahabharat*, *the Bhagawat Puran*, etc.), this festival signifies the end of a bad phase and the beginning of a good one. It also "marks the beginning of the harvest season when new crops are worshipped and shared with delight" (Singh 2024). The people of Braj celebrate the harvest of fresh crops by taking ceremonial baths in the Yamuna river, offering prayers to Shri Krishna for his blessings, and distributing and eating *Khichari* on this day.

3.2. Basant Panchami: On *Panchami*, the fifth day of *Shukla Paksha* in the month of *Magh*, Basant Panchami is celebrated with great fervor in the Braj region. The holy temples of Mathura, Vrindavan, Barsana, Govardhan, Nandgaon and Gokul are awash with yellow to welcome the spring. The fields are lush with mustard flowers in full bloom, temples are decorated with yellow and orange flowers, and many people dress in yellow hues. This festivity marks the beginning of spring and the end of winter.

3.3. Sharad Purnima: Sharad Purnima is a harvest festival that marks the end of the monsoon and the beginning of *Kartik* month. It is one of the best festivals celebrated in the Braj region on the next day of *Chaturdashi* of *Shukla Paksha* of *Ashwin* month. The deities in many temples of Braj are decorated in moon-white-colored robes on this auspicious day. Devotees sing melodious *bhajans* and do prayers to Srimati Radharani and Sri Krishna.

4. Preserving Culture through Agricultural Practices

Agricultural practices in the Braj region has very important contributions toward preserving cultural identity. Generation after generation, these time-honored methods have stuck to establishing a deep connection between the people, the land, spirituality, and community life.

4.1. Organic Manure: The knowledge in oral and written forms, passed down through generations, emphasizes sustainable organic farming, using cow-dung manure, cow urine, Panchagavya, in the region. The experiential wisdom of using cow-based

products has been preserved and practiced continuously by some people, reinforcing the agricultural heritage of Braj.

4.1.1. **Cow-dung Manure:** Cow-dung is an “important source of bio-fertilizer” (Raj 201).

The preparation of manure from cow-dung is a traditional agricultural practice that involves several key steps. Fresh cow-dung is collected from the households of the farmers or *gaushalas* and mixed with agricultural residues, such as straw, leaves, vegetable wastes, to enhance its nutrient content. This mixture is then heaped in a designated area and periodically turned to ensure aerobic decomposition. The process takes approximately three to four months, during which microbial activity breaks down the organic matter into a rich, dark compost. This manure is then applied to fields by some farmers (however, most of the farmers are using chemical fertilizers in their fields at present), improving soil structure, enhancing microbial activity, and providing essential nutrients for the crop growth.



Figure 5. Heaps of Cow-dung Manure (Source: Author)

4.1.2. Cow Urine: The cow urine “can be used for preparing effective bio-fertilizer” (Raj 201). It is utilized in organic farming as a liquid fertilizer and pest repellent in the Braj region. Rich in nutrients, enzymes, and plant growth hormones, it also contains high levels of nitrogen, urea, and minerals. This traditional practice is rarely used now-a-days to enhance soil fertility and promote sustainable agriculture by providing essential nutrients and protecting crops from pests naturally.

4.1.3. Panchagavya: Five products of cow called *panchagavya* is made from cow dung, urine, milk, curd, and ghee. It “is a component having crude protein, cellulose, hemicellulose and minerals” (Shrivastava 60). It has been an integral part of traditional

agricultural practices for centuries. This indigenous method, deeply rooted in local culture, enhances soil fertility and promotes sustainable farming, improving crop yield and resistance to pests without relying on chemical fertilizers. But, at present it is used by very few farmers in the Braj region.

- 4.2. Agricultural Tools:** The Braj region has a strong culture of traditional agricultural tools that are made specifically to address the farming needs of the local people and “it is our duty to develop, protect and preserve them” (Karthikeyan 212). The most common tools used are— plough, *patela*, *maja*, sickle, *fawda*, *khurpi*, winnower, sieve, spade and axe. These tools, crucial in numerous farm activities, are made from materials such as mild steel, scrap, iron, *babool* (Acacia), *shisham*, *neem*, and bamboo. The expertise of these skilled artisans has been maintained through family traditions and community apprenticeships across villages and towns in Braj. However, the modern agricultural tools are also in practice in the farming activities in the modern era.



Figure 6. Use of Maja in Farming (Source: Author)

- 4.3. Seeds and their Preservation Techniques:** Indigenous seeds are usually used by some farmers, and they preserve it to be sown the following year. Herbs like *tulsi* (basil) and its products hold an important place in temples and houses in Braj; the shopkeepers sell it and some farmers keep it for religious and medicinal purposes. The preservation techniques of seeds in the region are mainly traditional. Seeds like mustard, paddy, and wheat are kept in *kuthlas* (earthen granary) or drums. *Neem* leaves are layered inside to protect the seeds. In case of pulses,



Figure 7. A
Container for Grains
(Source: Author)

the seeds are sun-dried and kept in pots. Maize, for example, is dried and hung in bundles in sunny, airy spaces. Similarly, onion and garlic seeds are hung in well-ventilated rooms. The storage structures like straw stores, plastic pots and plastic and steel containers are also used to preserve seeds across seasons by the farmers.

4.4. Rains and Weather: Following Shri Krishna’s advice in the *Bhagawat Purana*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Bhagavad Gita*, the farmers in Braj region worship Govardhan Hill instead of Indra *Devta* (god) for rain. They perform *parikrama* (circumambulation) of sacred places like Govardhan, Barsana, Vrindavan, Nandgaon, etc. Devotees observe *upvaas* (fasting), and engage in *bhajan-kirtan* (devotional singing), *hawans* (fire rituals), and prayers to Lord Krishna and his beloved Radharani. These practices reflect deep reverence for Krishna’s teachings and the local traditions rooted in his guidance, ensuring the prosperity and spiritual well-being of the community.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (3.14), Shri Krishna says,

अन्नाद्भवन्ति भूतानि पर्जन्यादन्नसम्भवः।

यज्ञाद्भवति पर्जन्यो यज्ञः कर्मसमुद्भवः॥

annād bhavanti bhūtāni parjanyaḍ anna-sambhavaḥ

yajñād bhavati parjanyaḍ yajñaḥ karma-samudbhavaḥ.

Translation: “All living beings subsist on food, and food is produced by rains. Rains come from the performance of sacrifice, and sacrifice is produced by the performance of prescribed duties” (Mukundananda 2024).

In the Braj region, some farmers follow traditional *Panchangs*— the *Shree Brijbhoomi Panchang*, the *Hrishikesh Panchang*, the *Kaaldarshak Panchang*, the *Santosh Kaaldarshak Panchang*, the *Thakur Prasad Hindi Panchang*, the *Rupesh Thakur Panchang/ Calender*, and the *Vrindavan Chakshu Panchang* to predict weather and plan agricultural activities. These almanacs guide some farmers (however some other farmers get advice from the agriculture department of the government) on the best times for sowing, transplanting, and harvesting crops, considering specific *nakshatras* (constellations) and *tithis* (lunar days).

4.5. Farm Animals: In the Braj region, some farmers raise various livestock, including cows, buffaloes, sheep, goats, pigs, and hens. Notable indigenous breeds include *desi*, Sahiwal and Haryana breed cows, and the *Jamuna Pari* goat. They are used for getting milk and agricultural activities. To support and develop these animals, the region is home to several prominent institutions. Pt. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Pashu Chikitsa Vigyan Vishwavidyalaya Evam Go-Anusandhan Sansthan (DUVASU) and Central Institute for Research on Goats (CIRG), both located in Mathura, play crucial roles. These institutions provide research, veterinary care, and advancements in livestock management, ensuring the health and productivity of animals, which are integral to the agricultural economy and livelihoods in the Braj region.

Animal husbandry plays a very important role in the economy of small and marginal fanners. Livestock enterprise suits the landless, marginal and small farmers equally well, since it provides continuous income and gainful employment to the farmer's families including women and children. (Deoghare 916)

4.5.1. Specific Feeds or Chara: In Braj, some farmers use green fodder like *Chari* (fodder maize, *jwar*, millet) and *barseem* grass, while straw or hay serve as dry fodder. For *daana* (feed), animals are given *chokar*, made from wheat, barley, paddy, millet, and pulses, as well as *khali*, produced from mustard and cotton. These diverse feeding practices ensure the health and productivity of livestock, supporting the agricultural livelihood in the region.

4.5.2. Housing Systems for Farm Animals: Traditional housing for farm animals includes *gaushala*, animal sheds and calf pens. Some farmers also keep animals within their homes or in open spaces secured with fencing walls, wire or logs. These houses ensure the safety and well-being of livestock, reflecting the agricultural heritage of the region and practical approach to animal husbandry.

Gaushalas can become major supplier of inputs for promoting natural farming in the country through concerted efforts of the government, private players and entrepreneurs. (Niti Aayog 7)



Figure 8. Cows in a Household (Source: Author)

4.5.3.Traditional Remedies for Curing Animal Ailments: Some traditional remedies are occasionally used in Braj, particularly in the rural areas, when animals face health issues. If animals are not eating, *gud* (jaggery) is mixed with milk, boiled, made normal, and given to them. For flatulence, *aak* leaf juice is given to them. In case of hoof infection, animals are taken out in drain water. Mustard oil is given to lactating animals to address stomach upset and many times it is given to them to boost milk production. After giving birth, if a goat does not shed its *jer* (placenta), bamboo leaves are fed to it.

Ancient Indian literature in the form of the holy *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Brahmanas*, epics, etc. is flooded with information on animal care, health management, and disease cure. India has lived a life concentric with religion at its center and the cow occupied an important place, not merely for the nutritive lacto-products they offer, but also for cultural ethos. (Somvanshi 133)

4.6. Irrigation System: In the Braj region, various water bodies serve as crucial sources for irrigation and agriculture. The Yamuna river, Agra Canal, Ganga Canal (Manth Branch), Patvah river, and Karban (Karo) river, along with water bodies like *Noh Jheel* (lake), *Moti Jheel*, *Kitham Jheel*, *Paan Sarovar*, *Maan Sarovar*, *Chandra Sarovar*, *Prem Sarovar*, and several *kunds* and other ponds, play significant roles. According to poet Jagatnand, the number of old ponds in Braj is 159 and there are many new ponds

also. He has written that out of the old 159 ponds, 84 are only in Kambal Kaamvan and the remaining 75 are located in the other places of the region.

Yamuna is both a goddess and Govardhan's lover. Figural images of Krishna and Yamuna, as well as their representations as conical mountain and the river flowing diagonally within a picture frame, are found in art and popular culture. Typically, the arche-typal landscapes of the water body (*kund*) in the grove (*van*), ubiquitous in Braj, create a particular narrative about Krishna associated with the place. (Sinha 61)



Figure 9. The Yamuna in Vrindavan (Source: Author)

The traditional irrigation methods like Rehat and Dhekuli were used in the olden days. In the 20th century, modern irrigation systems were introduced with the construction of the Agra Canal in 1931 and the Ganga Canal (Manth Branch) in 1963 along with the installation of Tube-wells in the agricultural farms. These developments significantly improved water supply for agriculture, supporting the farming activities and boosting productivity in the modern era.

The water bodies of Braj are mostly replenished by rain, increasing water level in the earth and thus ensuring a consistent water supply for the fields. This network of rivers, lakes, ponds, etc., despite its deterioration in the present time, sustains the agricultural activities in the region, supporting the livelihoods of local farmers and the agrarian economy.

4.7. Agriculture Communities: The agricultural communities are primarily composed of small to medium-sized farmers hailing from almost all communities. These communities have a history rooted in ancient agrarian traditions, with a strong emphasis on crops like wheat, paddy, *jwar*, *bajra*, *arhar*, barley, vegetables, flowers, etc. Historically, the Braj region has been known for its fertile land and abundant water resources, which facilitated prosperous farming. Over time, many people from these communities have adapted modern farming techniques, while maintaining their traditional methods and strong communal ties.

The Mali, the Kachhi, and the Mallaah communities specifically choose vegetable and flower farming due to their historical expertise and the conducive agro-climatic conditions of the region. These practices offer quick returns and suit the fertile soil and ample water availability. Vegetable and flower farming also require intensive labor, which these communities are well-equipped to provide. Meanwhile, the other communities engage in mixed agricultural practices, including wheat, paddy, *jwar*, *bajra*, and barley farming. This diversification helps manage risks, ensures food security, and leverages the varying skills and resources available within different community groups, fostering economic stability and resilience.

In the Braj region, there is the need of upgrading the “built environment of village and living conditions of villagers, which include the socio-economic well-being, livable atmosphere, educational upliftment and societal integrity of the people living in the village” (Kapoor 133) for strengthening agricultural communities in the suburban and rural areas.

4.8. Women in Agriculture: Women in Braj play crucial roles in farming activities, balancing agricultural tasks with household responsibilities since the period of Shri Krishna and Balram as depicted in *the Bhagawat Purana*. Besides bearing and rearing children and caring for animals, they manage household chores. Therefore, women farmers are deeply involved in all levels of the agricultural value chain, from pre-harvest to post-harvest activities. In livestock farming, women gather feed, tend to sick animals, and prepare animal waste like cow dung cakes for fuel and revenue. They also produce milk-based products such as ghee, butter, curd, and whey. “This clearly showed that female labour was actively involved in crop and livestock production

system in the rural area” (Devghare 919). Their involvement in these activities is vital for the agricultural economy and sustainability of their communities.



Figure 10. Women Working in a Farm (Source: Author)

5. Conclusion

Braj is a region, where the elements of nature, agriculture and scripture harmonize and have deep roots in socio-spiritual and ecological traditions, concomitantly formulating its cultural heritage for the present and the future generations. The natural, agricultural and scriptural values of the region has, in recent times, been interfered with by modernization and, therefore, the result of it has affected the delicate balance in Braj— particularly related to its hills, forests, fields, soils, climate, rivers, lakes, ponds, trees, plants, animals, birds and the other ones. The amplified pollution, encroachment, and the erosion of natural resources are also visible in this region due to fast-growing urbanization and industrialization. However, the efforts of conservation, preservation and restoration of nature, agriculture, scripture and other healthy things connecting the roots would seem to be the only hope for the future of this region. Accordingly, the local communities, government, and religious institutions should work together in order to protect the cultural heritage of Braj. If developed and preserved properly, Braj would continue to inspire and nourish its timeless cultural heritage, thus, making it vibrant for generations ahead.

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