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Historical and Educational Significance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple in Nadia District, West Bengal: A Study of Cultural Heritage, Oral Traditions and Heritage Education

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Abstract

Historical monuments serve as important sources of knowledge about the cultural, religious, architectural, and social development of human communities. The Palpara TerracottaTemple, situated in Nadia district, West Bengal, represents a significant local heritage site whose historicalnarratives, traditionalarchitectural features, and changing religious practices deserve systematic academic investigation. Traditionally believed to be approximately four centuriesold, thetemple isassociatedwithlocalaccountsconcerning its foundation, although its precise date of construction and founder require verification through documentary and archaeological evidence. The study will examine the temple as a historical resource and explore its potential contribution to heritage education, local historical awareness, andcultural preservation. Historical monuments and cultural landscapes can support the interpretation ofthe past byconnecting materialremains with social memoryand community experience (Lowenthal, 1985; Smith, 2006).

The research will adopt a qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory approach, drawing upon field observation, photographic documentation, oral history interviews with local residents, and the

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examination of available historical records and relevant secondary literature. Particularattentionwillbegiventothetemple's architecturalcharacteristics,traditional religious practices, present physical condition, and oral narratives concerning its earlier use. The study will distinguish between historically verifiable information and unconfirmed local legends to maintain historical accuracy. Oral history can provide valuable insights into community experiences and collective memory, although individual recollections must be critically evaluated alongside other available evidence (Thompson, 2000).

The educational dimension of the study will investigate how the temple could be used as asite for experiential learning, local history teaching, heritage awareness programmes, and student field visits. Learning through direct engagement with historical places can help students connect classroom knowledge with material evidence, cultural practices, and the lived experiences of local communities (Hein, 1998). The study will also consider the possibilities of responsible heritage tourism and community-based economic development, alongside challenges relating to overcrowding, waste management, inadequate maintenance, and the protection of the temple's architectural features. Conservation planning should recognise both the physical fabric of heritage structures and their cultural significance to the communities associated with them (Australia ICOMOS, 2013).

The study is expected to demonstrate that the Palpara Terracotta Temple can be understood not merelyas a surviving religious structurebut also asa potentialeducationalresource and a repository of local historical memory. It will propose measures for heritage documentation, public awareness, student participation, environmentalcleanliness, and conservation-oriented visitor management. Bybringing together historicalinquiry and educationalperspectives, the research will seek to strengthen local heritage consciousness and encourage the responsible preservation of cultural resources for future generations.

Keywords: Palpara Terracotta Temple, Historical Heritage, Heritage Education, OralHistory, Cultural Preservation, Local History, Experiential Learning, Architectural Conservation, Heritage Tourism, Nadia District.

Introduction

Historicalmonumentsarevaluablesourcesf orunderstandingthearchitectural,religious, social, and cultural development of a region. They preserve material evidence of past societies

and help researchers interpret historical changes through buildings, decorative art, inscriptions, and community traditions (McCutchion, 1972). In Bengal, terracotta temple architecture developed distinctive regionalforms, withdecorative panels frequentlydepicting religious narrativesand other aspectsofculturallife(Patua, 2022).Nadiadistrict occupiesan important place in the cultural history of West Bengal, and its temples reflect the region's architectural and religious traditions. Sarkar (2022), in his study of temple architecture associated with the Krishnanagar dynasty, discusses Palpara among the historicallysignificant temples of Nadia. The district administration also identifies the Siva temple at Palpara as a notable heritage structure and records terracotta depictions associated with the Ramayana on its walls (Sarkar, 2022;

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Nadia District Administration, n.d.).The Palpara Temple is particularly relevant to historical research because its precise foundation date and founder have been subjects of differing accounts. Sengupta (n.d.) reports that the temple has little written documentation establishing its founder or exact dateofconstruction, while local and scholarly interpretations differ regarding its origin. Therefore, its history should be investigatedthroughdocumentaryevidence,architecturalexamination,andoraltestimony rather than relying exclusively on popular tradition. Fromaneducationalperspective, the temple offers an opportunity toconnect classroom teaching with direct observation of historical structures. Students can examine architectural forms, record local narratives, compare oral accountswithwrittensources,anddevelop an understanding of historical evidence. Such activities can support experiential learning and encourage awareness of the importance of preserving local heritage (Hein, 1998; Thompson, 2000).



BackgroundoftheStudy

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The terracotta temples of Bengal are important components of the region's architectural heritage. McCutchion (1972) provides a systematic account ofthe forms and classification of medieval temples in Bengal, offering a useful framework for studying the architectural characteristics of individual structures. Patua (2022) further examines the relationship between terracotta temple architecture and the development of Bengal's arts and crafts.Within this architectural tradition, the Palpara Temple is an important subject for local historicalinvestigation. Sarkar(2022) places Palpara withinthe wider development oftemple architecture in Nadia during the period associated with the Krishnanagar dynasty. The Nadia district administration also identifies the temple as a significant religious and architecturalsite in the district (Sarkar, 2022; Nadia District Administration, n.d.).However, the temple's precise historical chronology requires careful investigation. Published accounts refer to different possible dates and founders, demonstrating the need to compare documentary records, architectural evidence, and existing scholarly interpretations before establishing a definitive historical account (Sengupta, n.d.; Sarkar, 2022).Oral traditions form another important part of the temple's background. Local residents' recollections of earlier worship, religious ceremonies, and changes in the use of the temple may contribute to the reconstruction of its recent history. Thompson (2000) explains the value of oral history for documenting people's experiences and memories, while also underscoring the importance of critically interpreting personal testimony. The temple's educational potential is equally important. A structured heritage study could encourage students to investigate local architecture,conduct interviews,preparephotographicrecords,andunderstand howhistorical knowledge is constructed. These activities may strengthen the relationship between formal education and the cultural environment in which students live (Hein, 1998).

Rationaleofthe Study

Therationaleofthepresent studylies inthe needtoexaminethePalpara TerracottaTemple as both a historical monument and a potential educational resource. Although the temple is recognised as a significant heritage structure, its precise historical background, changing religious functions, and educational possibilities require further systematic investigation (Nadia District Administration, n.d.; Sarkar, 2022). First, the study is necessaryto address gaps in the historical documentation of the temple. Differing accounts of its origin demonstratetheimportanceofcriticallyexamining existing literatureandcomparing it with architectural observations and documentary evidence (McCutchion, 1972; Sarkar, 2022). Such an approach may help distinguish reliable historical information from assumptions and unverifiedtraditions.Second,thestudyis justified bytheeducationalvalueoflocalheritage. Historicalmonumentscanprovideopportunitiesforobservation, inquiry,andevidence-based learning beyond the classroom. By examining the temple directly, students may develop a better understanding of regional history, architectural development, religious practices, and the methods used by historians to interpret the past (Hein, 1998; McCutchion, 1972).

Third, the collection of oral histories is important because memories of former religious practicesandcommunityeventsmaynotbeavailableinwrittenrecords.Interviewswith elderly residents and other knowledgeable individuals may help document changes in the temple's social and religious functions. Nevertheless, such recollections must



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be compared with other sources before being accepted as historical evidence (Thompson, 2000).

Fourth, the study is motivated by the need to promote heritage conservation and public awareness. The protection of historical structures requires an understanding of their cultural significance, physical condition, and relationship with the surrounding community (Australia ICOMOS, 2013). In the case of Palpara, any proposed improvements to visitor facilities, waste management, or nearby commercial activities should be assessed to ensure that they do not damage the monument or obstruct its surroundings.

Finally, the study will explore the potential relationship betweenheritageeducation, communityparticipation, and responsible tourism. By integrating historical research witheducationalactivities,theresearchmayencourage students and residents to participate in documenting and preserving local cultural resources (Smith, 2006).

SignificanceoftheStudy

HistoricalSignificance

The study will contribute to the documentation of the Palpara Terracotta Temple by examining its architectural characteristics, historical background, religious associations, and place within the wider development of Nadia's temple architecture. Previous scholarship on Bengal's temples provides a framework for analysing regional architectural forms and their historical contexts (McCutchion, 1972; Sarkar, 2022).

EducationalSignificance

The research will explore how the temple could be incorporated into history teaching and heritage education. Activities such as field visits, architectural observation, oral history interviews, and the preparation of local heritage reports may help students connect historical concepts with material evidence and community experience (Hein, 1998; Thompson, 2000).

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CulturalSignificance

The temple provides an opportunity to document local traditions, religious memories, and community perceptions of cultural heritage. Research into terracotta architecture can also contribute to a wider understanding of Bengal's artistic and cultural traditions (Patua, 2022; Sarkar, 2022).

SignificanceforOralHistory

Interviews with elderly residents may help reconstruct the temple's recent history, including earlier religious ceremonies and changes in worship practices. Oral testimony can preserve otherwise undocumented experiences, provided that recollections are critically evaluated and compared with available written and material evidence (Thompson, 2000).

SignificanceforHeritageConservation

The research may identify conservation priorities relating to the temple's brickwork,terracotta decorations, cleanliness, visitor behaviour, and surrounding environment. A conservation-oriented approach should begin with an assessment of cultural significance and should avoid interventions that could compromise the monument's historical character (Australia ICOMOS, 2013).

SignificanceforLocalCommunityDevelopment

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Thestudywillconsiderwhetherresponsibleheritagetourismandeducationalvisitscould createopportunitiesforcommunityparticipationandsmall-scaleeconomicactivity. However, such initiatives should be planned in consultation with relevant authorities andlocal residents, with conservation and public access given priority (Smith, 2006).

SignificanceforFutureResearch

The research may provide a foundation for further studies on local temple architecture, regional history, oral traditions, heritage education, and conservation practices in Nadia district. It may also encourage comparative investigations of lesser-documented temples across West Bengal (McCutchion, 1972; Sarkar, 2022).

ObjectivesoftheStudy

1. Toinvestigatethehistoricalbackground,architecturalcharacteristics,andcultural significance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple in Nadia district, West Bengal.

2. Toexamine the educational potential of the Palpara Terracotta Temple as a resourceforlocal history learning, heritage awareness, and experiential learning among students.

3. To explorethe role oforaltraditions, communityparticipation, and conservation initiatives in preserving the historical heritage of the Palpara Terracotta Temple.

ResearchQuestions

1. What arethe historicalorigins, architecturalcharacteristics, and culturalsignificance ofthe Palpara Terracotta Temple in Nadia district, West Bengal?

2. HowcanthePalparaTerracottaTemplecontributetolocalhistoryeducation,heritage awareness, and experiential learning among students?

3. What role can oral traditions,local community participation, and conservation initiatives play in preserving the historical and educational value of the Palpara Terracotta Temple?

ReviewofRelatedLiterature

Author(s) andYear	Focusofthe Study	Major Contribution	Relevance to the Present Study
McCutchion (1972)	Late medieval temple architecture of Bengal	Classified temple forms and discussed their architecturaloriginsand characteristics.	Provides a framework for examining the architecturalfeaturesof thePalpara Temple.

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Ray et al. (1975)	Historical monuments and heritage of Nadia district	Provides a regional historical reference for investigating local monumentsandcultural traditions.	May help verify the temple's historical background and regional context.
Ojha(2012)	Heritage education in Indian schools	Emphasised the educationalimportanceof heritage awareness and	Supportstheeducational use of the temple for local history teaching.
		learning about cultural resources.	
Sarkar (2022)	Temple architecture in Nadia district during the Krishnanagar dynasty	Examined regional temple architecture and discussedthePalpara Temple within its historical context.	Providesadirectscholarly reference for investigating the temple's historical and architectural significance.
Patua(2022)	Bengal terracotta temple architecture and traditional arts	Examined the relationship between terracottaarchitectureand Bengal's artistic traditions.	Helps interpret the temple's architectural and cultural importance.
Raghuetal. (2023)	Local history education in Indian schools	Discussedtheeducational contribution of local historytocultural awareness and historical understanding.	Supports exploring the temple as a resource for experiential and place-based learning.
Chakraborty (2024)	Historical and heritage account of the Palpara Temple	Discussed the temple's heritage and raised questions about its historical identity.	Provides supplementary contextual information requiring comparisonwith scholarly and documentaryevidence.
Thompson (2000)	Oral history and historical research	Explained the use of oral testimony in reconstructing people's experiences and memories.	Supports interviews with elderly residents about past worship and community traditions.
Hein(1998)	Learning through museums and heritage environments	Explained how active engagementwithobjects and environments can support learning.	Provides a theoretical foundation for heritage-based fieldwork and student learning.
Smith(2006)	Heritage, cultural meanings, and social values	Examined heritage as a cultural and socialprocessratherthan merelya collection ofold structures.	Helps analyse community perceptions and the contemporarysignificance of the temple.

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Research Gap Identified from the Literature

Sl. No.	Area of Research	Existing ResearchFocus	Identified Research Gap	Proposed Contributionofthe Present Study
1	Historical background	General histories of Bengal's temples and regional temple architecture.	The temple's precise construction date, founder, and historical development require further verification.	To examine the temple's historical background using available records, published literature, and field observations.
2	Architectural heritage	Classificationand interpretation of Bengal's temple architecture.	Further site-specific documentation of the Palpara Temple's architecturalfeaturesis needed.	To document its architectural form, building materials, and surviving decorative elements.
3	Oraltraditions	General scholarship on oralhistoryand community memory.	Local narratives about earlier worship, religious ceremonies, and the alleged underground passage require systematic investigation.	Tocollectoral testimonies and critically compare them with documentary and material evidence.
4	Heritage education	General studies of heritageeducation and local history teaching.	Thespecificeducational potential of the Palpara Temple has not been sufficiently established intheliterature reviewed.	To explore its use for field visits, local history projects, and heritage awareness activities.
5	Historical consciousness	Research on cultural heritage and collective memory.	The relationship between local residents' memories and the temple'schangingsocial significance needs furtherexploration.	To investigate community perceptions and changes in the temple'sreligiousand culturalrole.
6	Conservation	Generalprinciples of heritage conservation and management.	The temple's current conservation needs and localenvironmental challenges require focused assessment.	To identify potential conservationpriorities and responsible visitor-management measures.
7	Community development	General literature on heritage tourism and local development.	The possibilities and limitations of community-based heritage tourism at Palpara need assessment.	To explore responsible tourism opportunities that protectthetempleand respect residents' needs.

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AlignmentofResearchObjectives,Questions,andGaps

ResearchObjective	Corresponding Research Question	Research Gap Addressed
1. To investigate the historical background, architectural characteristics, and cultural significance of the Palpara TerracottaTempleinNadia district,West Bengal.	What are the historical origins, architectural characteristics, and cultural significance of the temple?	Limited integration of site-specific historical documentation and architectural analysis.
2. To examine the educational potential of the Palpara Terracotta Temple as a resource for local historylearning,heritage awareness, and experiential learning among students.	How can the temple contributeto local history education, heritage awareness, and experiential learning among students?	Insufficient site-specific investigation of heritage-based educational opportunities.
3.Toexploretheroleoforal	Whatrolecanoraltraditions,	Limitedintegrationof

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traditions, community participation, and conservation initiativesinpreservingthe historical heritage of the Palpara Terracotta Temple.	local community participation, and conservation initiatives play in preserving the temple's historicalandeducationalvalue?	oral history, community perspectives, and conservation planning.

ResearchMethodology

The present study adopted a historical and qualitative research approach to examine the historical and educational significance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple in Nadia district, West Bengal. ThestudyareacomprisedPalparaand itssurrounding locality, withasampleof 100 respondents selected through purposive sampling. Primary data were collected through field observation, interviews, and oral testimonies, while secondary data were obtained from books, research articles, historical documents, and published accounts relating to Bengal's temple architecture and heritage education. The collected data were analysed through historical source criticism and qualitative thematic interpretation, focusing on the temple's historical background, architectural features, cultural traditions, educational potential, and conservation needs. Information from different sources was compared to distinguish corroborated historical evidence from local beliefs and unverified traditions. The study also examined the temple's potential as a resource for local history learning, heritage awareness, and community participation in cultural preservation.

AnalysisandInterpretation

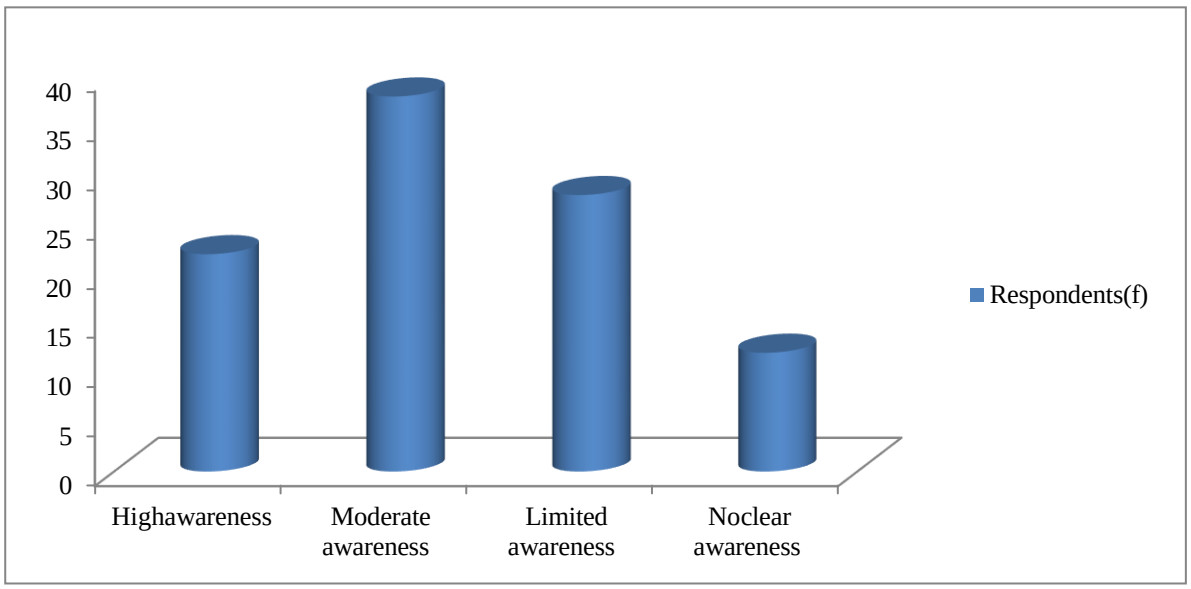
Objective 1: Historical Background, Architectural Characteristics and Cultural Significance

Research Question 1: What are the historical origins, architectural characteristics, andcultural significance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple?

Table 1. Respondents'awareness ofthe historicaland culturalsignificance ofthetemple (N = 100)

Indicatorsofawareness	Respondents (f)	Percentage
Highawareness	22	22%
Moderateawareness	38	38%
Limitedawareness	28	28%
Noclearawareness	12	12%
Total	100	100%

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Interpretation: The illustrative data indicate that 60% of respondents possessed high or moderate awareness of the temple's historical and cultural significance, whereas 40%reported limited or unclear awareness. This pattern, if confirmed by actual field data, would suggest that local knowledge of the temple exists but may not be equally distributed throughout the community. The temple's traditional architectural form, burnt-clay brick construction, religious associations, and place in community memory may contribute to its local historical importance. However, the precise date of construction and identity of its founder should be established through reliable documentary or architectural evidence rather than oral tradition alone.

Objective2:EducationalPotentialandExperientialLearning

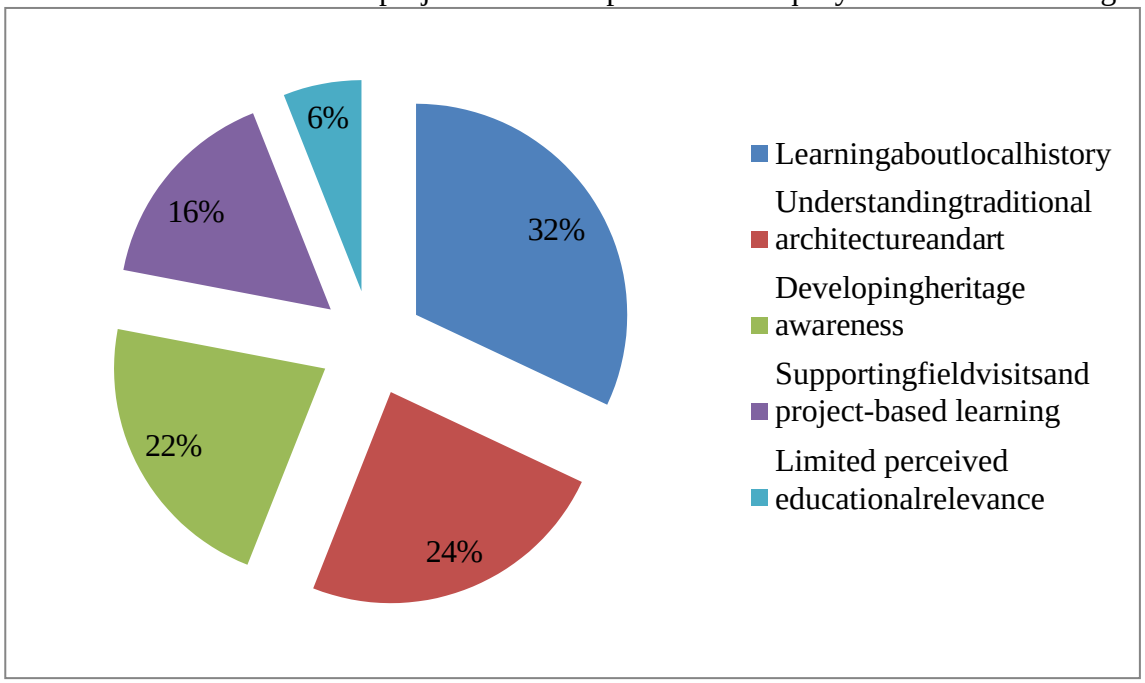
Table2.Perceivededucationalpotentialofthe temple(N= 100)

Educationalapplication	**Respondents (f)**	**Percentage**
Learningaboutlocalhistory	32	32%
Understandingtraditionalarchitectureandart	24	24%
Developingheritageawareness	22	22%
Supportingfieldvisitsandproject-based learning	16	16%
Limitedperceivededucationalrelevance	6	6%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: The illustrative distribution shows that local history learning received the highest proportion of responses (32%), followed by the study of traditional architecture and art (24%). Heritage awareness and field-based learning were also identified as possible educational applications. These patterns suggest that a historic temple can provide opportunities to connect classroom instruction with direct observation of material heritage, local narratives, architectural features, and changing cultural practices. Teachers could use

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structured heritage visits, observation schedules, interviews with knowledgeable residents, and student documentation projects to develop historical inquiry and critical thinking. Such



educational activities would need to be planned responsibly, with appropriate permissionsand measures to protect the monument.

Objective3:OralTraditions,CommunityParticipationandConservation

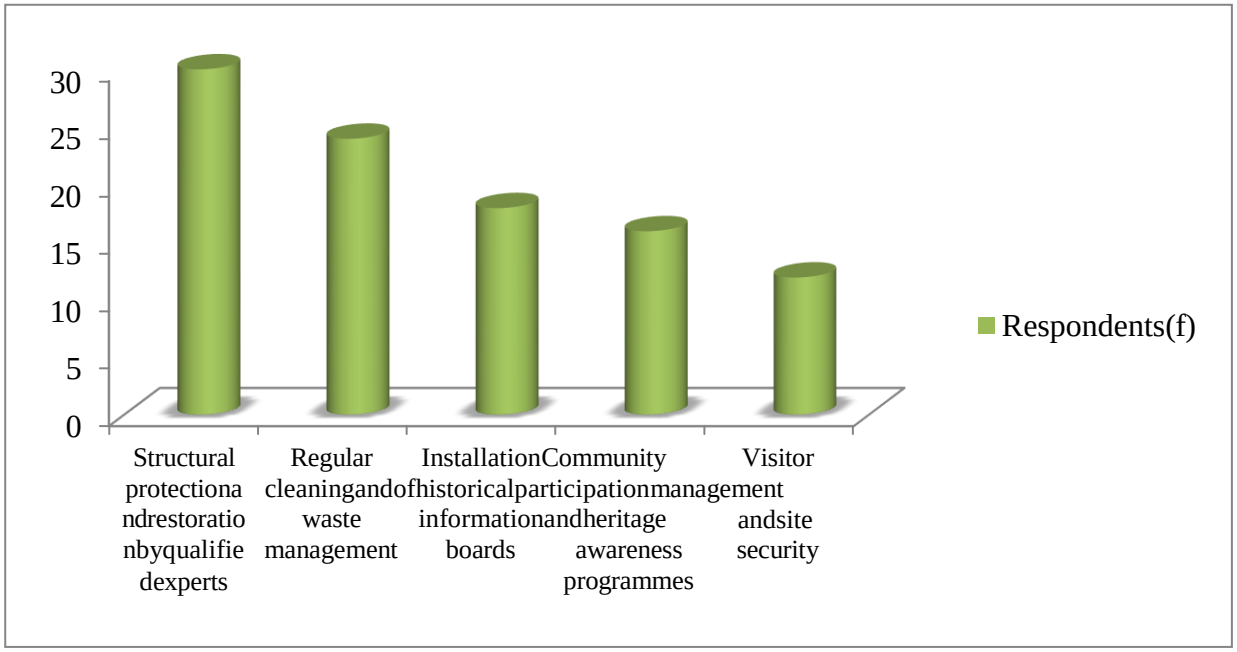
Table3. Perceivedpriorities fortempleconservation(N=100)

Conservationpriority	**Respondents (f)**	**Percentage**
Structuralprotectionandrestoration byqualifiedexperts	30	30%
Regularcleaningandwastemanagement	24	24%
Installationofhistoricalinformationboards	18	18%
Community participation and heritage awareness programmes	16	16%
Visitormanagement andsitesecurity	12	12%
Total	100	100%

Interpretation: In this illustrative table, structural protection and restoration received the highest proportion of responses (30%), followed by cleaning and waste management (24%). Information boards, community participation, and site security were also identified as potential priorities. If supported by actual responses, these findings would indicate the importance of combining physical conservation with public awareness and community involvement. Oraltraditions mayhelppreserve memoriesofearlierworship, rituals, and local practices that are not adequately documented in written records. Nevertheless, oral accounts should be recorded with consent and cross-checked wherever possible. Any proposed

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restoration, vegetation clearance, visitor facilities, or commercial activity near the temple should be assessed by the relevant heritage authorities to avoid damage to the historic structure.



The three objectives collectively establish a connection between historical heritage,education, and conservation. The temple's historicaland architecturalfeatures provide a basis for studying regional cultural development, while oral traditions offer insights into community memory and changing religious practices. Its educational potential lies inenabling studentsto investigate localhistorythroughobservation, documentation, interviews, and critical examination of historical evidence. At the same time, the long-term preservation of the site requires appropriate technical conservation, responsible visitor management, accurate historical interpretation, and meaningful community participation.

The study therefore highlights the potential value of the Palpara Terracotta Temple as both a historical monument and a resource for heritage education. However, the extent of public awareness, the educational benefits perceived by respondents, and the community's conservation priorities must be established from the actual field data before these interpretations can be reported as empirical findings.

Findingsofthe Study

The findings of the study on the historical and educational significance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple in Nadia district, West Bengal, are presented in relation to the three research objectives.

1. Historical and cultural significance: The study highlighted the importance of the Palpara Terracotta Temple as a component of the local cultural heritage of Nadia district. Its traditional architectural features, burnt-clay brick construction, religious associations, and place in community memory provide valuable opportunities for understanding regional

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history. However, the precise construction date and identity of its founder require further verification through reliable historical documents and architectural evidence.

2. Educational significance: The study identified the potential of the temple as a resource for local history education, heritage awareness, and experiential learning. Field visits, architecturalobservation,oralhistoryinterviews,andstudent-leddocumentationactivities could help learners connect classroom knowledge with local historical evidence. Such activities may also encourage historical inquiry, critical thinking, and respect for cultural heritage.

3. Importance of oral traditions: Oral accounts and community memories provide useful insights into the temple's earlier religious practices, traditional ceremonies, and changing social significance. These accounts may help preserve aspects of local history that are absent from written records. Nevertheless, oral narratives and legends require critical examination and corroboration before being accepted as established historical facts.

4. Conservation and community participation: The study highlighted the importance of structural protection, environmental cleanliness, appropriate visitor management, historical information boards, and community awareness. Collaboration among local residents, educational institutions, heritage professionals, and relevant authorities could contribute tothe responsible preservation of the temple.

5. Scope for heritage-based development: The temple has potential to support educational visits,localheritagedocumentation,andresponsibleculturaltourism.However,anyproposed development, including commercial facilities or changes to the surrounding area, should be carefully assessed to prevent overcrowding, environmental deterioration, or damage to the historic structure.

Conclusion

The Palpara Terracotta Temple represents a potentially valuable source of historical knowledge, culturalmemory, and educationalexperience in Nadia district, West Bengal. The present study examined its significance not merely as an architectural structure but also as a heritage resource through which local history, traditional practices, community identity, and cultural preservation can be explored. Its architectural characteristics and religious associations provide a foundation for further historical investigation, while oral traditions offer insights into the community's relationship with the monument over time.

The study also emphasises the relevance of heritage-based learning in education. Incorporating local historical sites into teaching and learning can help students develop observationalskills, historicalunderstanding, criticalthinking, and anappreciationofcultural diversity. The temple could serve as a practical learning environment through guided visits, field-based assignments, oral history documentation, and collaborative heritage projects.Such educational initiatives would connect theoretical knowledge with the historical and cultural resources available in students' immediate surroundings.

At the same time, the long-term preservation of the temple requires systematic documentation, evidence-based conservation, environmental management, and active

community participation. Local narratives should be recorded respectfully and examined critically, while historical claims should be supported by credible evidence whereverpossible. Conservation and tourism initiatives must prioritise the protection ofthe monument over commercial development.

In conclusion, the Palpara Terracotta Temple offers an important opportunity to connect historical research, heritage education, and community-based conservation. Its continued preservationdependsoncooperationamonglocalcommunities,researchers,educators,and the relevant heritage authorities. By promoting responsible documentation, educational engagement, and conservation awareness, the temple's historical and cultural value can be better understood and safeguarded for future generations.

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