



Impact of tourism on intangible cultural heritage: case of Kalbeliyas from Rajasthan, India

Ruchika Ranwa

To cite this article: Ruchika Ranwa (2022) Impact of tourism on intangible cultural heritage: case of Kalbeliyas from Rajasthan, India, *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 20:1-2, 20-36, DOI: [10.1080/14766825.2021.1900208](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1900208)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2021.1900208>



Published online: 21 Mar 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 1680



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 25 View citing articles [↗](#)



Impact of tourism on intangible cultural heritage: case of Kalbeliyas from Rajasthan, India

Ruchika Ranwa

Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India

ABSTRACT

Through the case of intangible cultural heritage of Kalbeliya dance and songs of India, this paper argues that tourism can profoundly affect intangible heritage as well as its practitioners or bearers. In-depth interviews and observation were employed to collect data for this paper. Findings show that tourism has led to drastic changes in the aesthetic content of Kalbeliya performances as well as the context in which they are performed due to their increased production in commercial settings leading to their commodification. Kalbeliya performers, who should ideally act as active agents as heritage practitioners, are also marginalized culturally from their own performing traditions. Among positive consequences of tourism, results reveal limited economic benefits for Kalbeliya performers and their improved self-esteem as cultural custodians which has also remained limited to a few popular Kalbeliya performers.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 2 May 2020
Accepted 2 March 2021

KEYWORDS

Intangible cultural heritage;
tourism; marginalization;
Kalbeliyas; India

Introduction

Heritage tourism, as one of the most widespread forms of tourism today, has grown unprecedentedly across the world in last few decades (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Apart from being acknowledged as means of wider dissemination and promotion of heritage elements or forms, the increasing growth of heritage tourism has been widely attributed to its potential in acting as a source of economic growth which is more apparent in the case of developing countries to serve their economic interests (Smith, 2003). Heritage creation and heritage tourism are also employed to reinforce the sense of national identity at the national level and to propagate particular ideologies at the international level by different countries (Leimgruber, 2010; Scher, 2010). However, at the same time, heritage tourism also acts as a source of inducing changes into heritage forms which emerges as a matter of consideration. Tourism has repeatedly sparked concerns of sustainability with respect to heritage forms (Carr, Ruhanen, & Whitford, 2016; Moscardo & Murphy, 2014). Nevertheless, there is observed to be a dearth of scholarship in relation to the impact of heritage tourism in developing countries that usually have a richer cultural fabric in terms of intangible cultural forms (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009).

The impact of tourism on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) is considered as difficult to assess (Carr et al., 2016). The ever-changing and dynamic nature of ICH forms in response

CONTACT Ruchika Ranwa  ruchika.ranwa@gmail.com

This article has been republished with minor changes. These changes do not impact the academic content of the article.

© 2021 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group

to the changing contexts acts as an impediment to gauge the impact of tourism on them. Change is underlined as inherent to ICH forms, while heritage practitioners or bearers are considered central in safeguarding these forms (Lowthorp, 2015; Smith, 2006; Su, 2019). The critical heritage studies (CHS) approach foregrounds the role of the local practising communities in defining, re-defining and safeguarding intangible heritage forms, as they are the ones who embody these forms (Blake, 2009; Kryder-Reid, 2018; Smith, 2006). CHS also upholds the needs and interests of local communities in their heritagization process and later in the management of their heritage forms. With respect to tourism, UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (the ICHC) states that tourism is beneficial as long as ICH bearers are the main beneficiaries of tourism practices around their ICH and as far as tourism does not alter the meanings an ICH stands for (UNESCO, 2018, p. 53, 71). Su (2019) goes to the point of arguing that even the commodification of ICH is beneficial as long as the local bearers of ICH can actively participate in the process by being able to associate their traditional meanings and values with its commodified form. Hence, the impact of tourism on ICH needs to be analyzed at two levels: on the cultural artefact, form or practice and on its bearers or practitioners.

Tourism can have positive as well as negative impact on intangible heritage and on its bearers. The existing scholarship suggests that negative consequences of tourism on intangible heritage include its homogenization, commodification, altering traditional meanings and values attached with it, marginalization of local practitioners involving their replacement by more professional performers and even their disempowerment or sometimes exploitation (Alobiedat, 2018; Beardslee, 2016; Chan, 2017; Munsu, 2012; Reed, 2002; Robinson & Packman, 2014; Schreffler, 2012; Singh, 2017; Zahira, 2014). The positive impact of tourism involves the revitalization of cultural traditions, their increased visibility, inter-cultural exchange, employment opportunities for local communities, enhancing their pride and self-esteem (Baillie, Chatzoglou, & Taha, 2010; Cole, 2007; Edensor, 2001; Finn, 2009; Smith, 2003; Su, 2019). The above-mentioned negative effects are more pronounced in the developing nations as compared to the developed nations due to excessive emphasis of the former on heritage tourism as potential means of their socio-economic development (Smith, 2003; Timothy & Nyaupane, 2009). This study examines the impact of tourism on the ICH of Kalbeliya dance and songs in India. It focuses on discussing the changes which tourism has brought about in the content and contexts of Kalbeliya performances through observations of their staged presentations today in different settings. It also analyses the implications of tourism for Kalbeliya performers by underlining their experiences and nature of participation in tourism-driven production of the staged Kalbeliya performances. The paper will broadly reflect upon the role of heritage bearers and their possible challenges in their heritage safeguarding process post their recognition.

The research setting

Kalbeliya community is known for its nomadic lifestyle and is scattered across different parts of Rajasthan, a state located in north-western India. Kalbeliyas belong to a low caste which has been traditionally associated with the practice of snake charming and begging (Dutt, 2004; Robertson, 1997). With decline in snake charming as their traditional

occupation due to the ban imposed on snake catching by the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 of the Indian government, a small section of Kalbeliya women shifted to their dance as an occupation during 1980s for their survival (Angelillo, 2012). Earlier, dance was considered as a cultural practice largely restricted to within their community. Hence, the shift was not welcomed within the community initially, rather women dancing in public is still viewed as derogatory by many Kalbeliyas. However, despite the social stigma around it, dance was gradually modified by a few Kalbeliyas to make it attractive and was performed near local fairs in villages. Anticipating it as having the potential to contribute to the tourism sector of Rajasthan state, this form of Kalbeliya dance was included among the folk dances of India during 1980s. This was facilitated with the efforts of the tourism department of Rajasthan by promoting Kalbeliya dancers with other folklorists in state-level cultural programmes (Joncheere, 2015). This was later succeeded by the nomination of Kalbeliya dance along with Kalbeliyas' songs by the Indian state for the status of ICH by UNESCO which culminated into their inscription on the Representative List of the ICH in 2010. Post their heritage recognition, the Indian state further promoted the staging of Kalbeliya dance in cultural and tourism festivals at both national as well as international levels. As a consequence, the pace of tourism development has intensified around Kalbeliya dance over the last decade. This trend has been confirmed by the Kalbeliya dancers who underline the increasing opportunities of stage performances and the escalating number of Kalbeliya dancers in the past decade. Over the last four decades, Kalbeliyas' performing traditions have been brought out of the community to the stage for public consumption and have undergone a sea change. Dance at the community level among Kalbeliyas looks completely different from its staged presentations. However, what is widely promoted as Kalbeliyas' cultural heritage is the staged form of Kalbeliya dance. This study is rooted in the context of recent tourism-led increased production of Kalbeliya performances in order to examine the impact of tourism on the staging of Kalbeliyas' cultural heritage and its bearers. Though the number of Kalbeliya dancers has grown over the years due to tourism-related work prospects for them, they still constitute a miniscule proportion of the whole community as dance still stands as a matter of dispute within the community. This study majorly focuses on Kalbeliya performers which have their considerable population settled in Jodhpur, Pushkar, Jaipur and Jaisalmer regions of Rajasthan.

Methods

To reiterate, the focus of this study is to understand the impact of tourism in transforming the performative or aesthetic content of Kalbeliyas' intangible heritage and on Kalbeliya performers who embody it. To suit these objectives, a qualitative method was used to analyse the changing content as well as the context of Kalbeliyas' performances and to examine the extent of participation of Kalbeliya performers in it. A review of existing literature on tourism and its possible implications for intangible heritage thoroughly informed this study. For the purpose of data collection, observation and personal interviews were used over the period of three years, from 2017 to 2019. Observation was used to examine the staged presentations of Kalbeliya performances in government-organized cultural programmes as well as in commercial settings such as hotels and resorts. Multiple rounds of observations were conducted of these settings to closely observe

the content as well as contexts in which Kalbeliya performances were made. These observations were supplemented with interviews of Kalbeliya performers as well as non-performers to understand how Kalbeliya dance and songs were and are practised within the community today.

For interviews, snowball sampling proved efficient for the identification of interviewees, with initial few contacts of Kalbeliya performers snowballing into larger networks of performers as most of the performers were helpful in referring to other known contacts. Also, a few locals acted as informants who aided in introducing to some Kalbeliyas and the areas where they lived. Personal interviews with Kalbeliya performers (forty in total including thirty-two women dancers and eight men singers or musicians) were informal and in-depth in nature which reflected upon their experiences as performers, their understanding of changes undergone by their performances, the role of tourism in it and their perception towards it. The interviews also revealed the impact of tourism on social, economic and cultural status of Kalbeliya performers; however, this paper only focuses on the cultural dimension. There were interviews conducted with Kalbeliya non-performers as well as non-Kalbeliyas (twenty-five in total), which included locals as well as tourists, to understand their viewpoint towards today's staged Kalbeliya performances.

The government cultural institutions and tourist departments were visited to know about the cultural programmes organized by them, how they selected and approached Kalbeliya performers and if they had a role in shaping the representation of Kalbeliya performances in these programmes. The list of interviewees included government officials and hotel managers in order to understand the extent of their involvement in the production and representation of Kalbeliyas' performances. These officials approached for interviews were associated with the government cultural institutions as well as non-governmental organizations which were consulted during the nomination of Kalbeliya dance and songs as ICH and for their safeguarding plan post its recognition (they are mentioned as community organizations in Kalbeliyas' nomination file for heritage recognition). Before delving into the findings, it needs to be underlined here that this paper uses the terms 'performer' and 'dancer' interchangeably with respect to Kalbeliyas. The term performer is more encompassing which can represent both Kalbeliya dancers and singers. However, despite the fact that both Kalbeliya dance and songs were recognized as ICH, it is mostly their dance that has been promoted by the Indian state as well as in the tourism sector. Consequently, due to lesser demand, Kalbeliya singers and their singing performances have become a rarity today. Though the article attempts to stick to the term performer, in most findings, the term dancer is more relevant to use.

Findings and discussion

Tourism development around heritage forms and their local bearers has had substantial implications for them along economic, political, social as well as cultural axes. Followed by its inscription as ICH by UNESCO, the Kalbeliya dance has been increasingly exposed to the domain of tourism through its promotion and dissemination in government cultural programmes at regional, national as well as international levels. Initially, the introduction of Kalbeliya dance to the tourism industry was facilitated by the Indian state itself through the promotion of Kalbeliya dance and subsequently its inclusion among folk dances of India in 1980s. This had coincided with the focus of the Indian state on the promotion

of folk arts of India during 1980s and on its portrayal as encompassing a rich cultural diversity (Joncheere, 2017). This context is imperative to understand here, as it shows the role of the Indian state as a patron in both pre- and post-heritage recognition phases of Kalbeliya dance. The recent promotion of Kalbeliya dance after its recognition as ICH can be seen as a continuation of the state's earlier approach like observed in the case of Kutiyattam theatre of Kerala. As an art patron, the Indian state inculcated a sense of endangerment and safeguarding around Kutiyattam in both its pre- and post-heritage recognition phases and continues to helm its safeguarding process in terms of its documentation, promotion and funding (Lowthorp, 2017).

Similar to the case of Kutiyattam, the Indian state has remained at the helm of escalating the promotion of Kalbeliya dance after its recognition as ICH. This is corroborated by the implementation of safeguarding process proposed by the Indian state during Kalbeliyas' nomination. To ensure the implementation process, there are various governmental and non-governmental competent bodies identified at state as well as central levels. At the state level in Rajasthan, there are Jawahar Kala Kendra (JKK), Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Academy (RSNA) and West Zonal Cultural Centre (WZCC). At the central level, there are Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) (UNESCO, 2010). The nomination dossier of Kalbeliyas mentions various safeguarding proposals in terms of its identification, documentation, transmission and promotion. Despite this multi-pronged approach laid out towards safeguarding during the nomination, the interviews with some government officials revealed that they mostly focused on the aspect of promotion by the organization of Kalbeliya performances in their cultural programmes. They shared that government-sponsored cultural programmes are held on a regular basis with Kalbeliya performances essentially included in them. The cultural festivals, such as Camel Festival (Bikaner), Pushkar Mela (Ajmer), Desert Festival (Jaisalmer), Lokrang Festival (Jaipur) and Lokanujan Mela (Jodhpur), organized by government cultural institutions were observed in the field. As far as the Kalbeliya performers are concerned, they are mostly contacted for their performances only by these concerned government institutions and their officials. Besides that, the performers, including the most senior ones, did not mention any significant interaction with the government bodies. In fact, some of them get to know about government cultural programmes through Manganiyars who are popular traditional musicians and have better social capital than Kalbeliyas. Manganiyars often work in collaboration with Kalbeliyas.

The centrality of promoting Kalbeliya performances in state-supported cultural and tourism festivals has overshadowed other proposed safeguarding measures. The government officials could not comment much on the initiatives of dance school, fellowships and workshops, which are proposed in the nomination dossier for Kalbeliya performers to learn, transmit and disseminate their heritage as well as to spearhead the process of its safeguarding as heritage custodians (UNESCO, 2010). It was appalling to know that some of the officials were not even aware of the ICH status of Kalbeliya dance. This high level of unawareness was poignantly true with respect to Kalbeliya dancers as well. Even the signatories to the consent forms for the nomination of Kalbeliya dance and songs as ICH were unaware of their ICH recognition and denied having any information around it. During the entire course of fieldwork, there were only two Kalbeliya performers who were found to be aware of their heritage recognition. Their information was also restricted to the heritage label only, as they were entirely unaware of what roles,

responsibilities and benefits the process of heritagization attributes to them. The understanding of some government officials as well as most Kalbeliya performers seemed to remain limited to Kalbeliya dance being extremely popular and hence advantageous for them.

The government-supported promotion of Kalbeliya dance has also been paralleled with its fall into the clutches of private actors in the tourism industry since 1980s. The Kalbeliya dance has been gradually co-opted by hotels and resorts in regions that act as major tourist destinations in Rajasthan, such as Jaisalmer, Bikaner and Jodhpur. Rajasthan in itself is an extremely popular tourist destination in India and acts as a huge hub for tourists. Some of the hotel managers in Jaisalmer shared that they had been organizing Kalbeliya performances since 1990s, but there has been a spike in their demand in the last decade. Now, Kalbeliya performances have become the main highlight of the daily cultural evenings organized in their hotels for tourists (observation of cultural evenings organized in hotels of Jaisalmer and Bikaner, January 2018). The interviews with hotel managers and staff also revealed about their complete ignorance about the ICH status of Kalbeliya dance. They looked at Kalbeliya dance more in terms of its unprecedented popularity and demand. This was also underscored by Kalbeliya dancers as the increased commercial production of Kalbeliya performances in the past few years resulted in a plethora of work opportunities for Kalbeliyas as dancers in hotels and resorts. However, such excessive emphasis on tourism as one of the measures to facilitate the promotion and dissemination of Kalbeliyas' dance has had a huge bearing upon Kalbeliyas dance as well as dancers.

Changing Kalbeliya performances

The performative content and context of Kalbeliya dance and songs have been receptive to various changes since the times they were adapted to staged presentations from being community-level practices before 1980s (Joncheere, 2015). The process of cultural practices when uprooted from their original settings and reproduced in new settings is described as decontextualization (Munsi, 2012; Singh, 2017). Earlier, dance and songs among Kalbeliyas were majorly restricted to rites of passage marking birth, marriage, death and so on within the community or at times they were performed promptly for entertainment purposes while Kalbeliyas begged in villages. Kalbeliya women gradually modified their dance by making it faster and acrobatic and began to perform it publicly in nearby villages and cities as a source of their survival. The context of their performances further changed with the national- and international-level recognition of Kalbeliya dance and songs. Today, they are performed in the form of staged presentations in different settings, varying from state-organized cultural festivals and programmes to cultural functions in hotels and resorts.

Earlier, Kalbeliya dance was described as dance of a few movements with slower tempo when it was performed within the community or sometimes even publicly when Kalbeliyas begged. The dance involved slow whirling movements with most of the actions left to hands in contrast to very fast movements involving the whole body with which people are exposed now in its current staged presentations. At the community level, even today, dance among Kalbeliyas continues to be slow involving majorly hand movements, and the Kalbeliyas associate more with this dance form as shared by them during

interviews. This style continues to be well celebrated in the community and is joyously performed on various occasions (personal interviews with senior Kalbeliya performers in Jaipur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer, January–February 2019). At stage, the Kalbeliya dancers now have their dance steps styled around fast songs or rhythms. Their gyrating dance movements on stage include plenty of pelvic thrusts, jerks and tweaks. They also involve gymnastic steps such as bending their bodies backwards to pick notes placed at the ground with their mouths or sometimes with their eyes (the observation of Kalbeliya performances in government festivals organized in Bikaner and Pushkar, 2018–2019). The perfect execution of these fast acrobatic movements by Kalbeliya dancers reflects upon agility and flexibility of their bodies which is often compared to flexibility in a snake's body to assert their association with their earlier practice of snake charming. This association, which reinforced the ancientness of Kalbeliya dance and acted as the basis for its recognition as folk dance and then as ICH, is claimed as contrived (Joncheere, 2015). The above-discussed changes in the staged Kalbeliya dance form are visible in both government programmes as well as in the programmes in commercial settings (Figure 1).

Furthermore, in commercial or private settings such as hotels and resorts, staged Kalbeliya dance has become highly commodified, and Kalbeliya performers are treated



Figure 1. Kalbeliya dancers performing at a Government-organized cultural festival in Jaipur. Source: Author (October 2019).

merely as entertainers. A typical stage in hotels and resorts is circular or square-shaped, enclosed by a few stairs which act as a seating area, or more like a lounge area for the audience with mattresses to sit or lie down on. The stage is very dimly lit along with some lights which are constantly wavering like flashy disco lights. There are alcohol and snacks kiosks next to the stage apart from the food arrangements done for the audience by hotels as part of the cultural evenings. The hotels and resorts of Jaisalmer and Bikaner, which are thronged by tourists during the winter season (October–March), have Kalbeliya performances shaped in accordance with the interests and choices of the audience. Their performances are marked by sensuous dance movements, athletic stunts, the inclusion of Bollywood songs as well as loud music played on speakers or woofers. The Kalbeliya dance performances make for a small part of these cultural evenings in these settings and are then followed by their dance on Bollywood songs (the observation of cultural evenings in hotels of Jaisalmer, January 2018). Singh (2017) observed similar changes in Nautanki and Tamasha (theatre forms in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra, respectively, which include dance, music and humour) which are today performed on Bollywood item songs and are moving more towards orchestra set up. The most unfortunate thing noticed during the fieldwork was seeing young Kalbeliya girls dancing on Bollywood songs and practising acrobatic steps when requested to show a few Kalbeliya dance steps during some interviews. Contrary to the commercial settings, the government programmes comparatively stick more to Kalbeliya songs and dance performances. However, performances in government programmes are also not absolutely immune to changes, as they are also simplified and are made exotic in order to make it fascinating for the audience. In order to make the dance further fascinating, the Kalbeliya dancers go to the extent of picking sharper objects such as blades, finger rings and needles with their eyes. They walk and dance with simultaneously balancing a string of pots on their heads which is also combined with walking barefoot on broken mirrors and sharp nails. These activities are celebrated with exceptional vigour among the audience, despite grave risks associated with them (the observation of Kalbeliya performances in hotels of Jaisalmer and in government festivals organized in Bikaner and Pushkar, 2018–2019). A very senior Kalbeliya dancer shared that (Figure 2)

When I started dancing, our dance was very slow. In fact, the songs which were sung were slow too. Those very songs are today sung using faster beats to make the dance faster and hence attractive. Today, Kalbeliya girls are doing anything in the name of Kalbeliya dance. People like fast movements and Kalbeliya dance is getting modified accordingly in the tourism industry. (Respondent D, November 2019)

The traditional diverse repertoire of Kalbeliyas' songs, despite being a crucial part of Kalbeliyas' ICH, is also reduced to just a few songs in staged Kalbeliya performances. Their songs are also at times completely sidelined and are replaced by other faster folk songs and even Bollywood songs sometimes. A few popular Kalbeliyas' songs, which are majorly replicated in staged Kalbeliya performances, are fast, catchy, fascinating and familiar to people such as *kalyo kood padyo* (a song about a local cultural fair) and *cham chamke chundri* (the song conveys a desire of a woman to get a stole with a lot of glitter from her husband). Contrary to these, there exists a vast diversity of Kalbeliya



Figure 2. A typical stage in hotels and resorts (at the top). At the bottom, an alcohol kiosk right next to the stage. Source: Author. (January 2018).

songs around several rites of passage of life. A middle-aged Kalbeliya dancer, while singing different songs during her interview, told that

We have songs for every ceremony and occasion in our community but we cannot sing these songs in our programmes. Nobody would be able to understand these songs and will lose interest. So we do not take the risk as there is no demand for our other songs. However, ideally, we should perform all our songs and people should know about our rich culture but unfortunately that will not earn us our survival. (Respondent Z, August 2019)

Thus, Kalbeliya performers resort to performing only on two-three popular songs of theirs because people are not familiar with their other songs. According to them, their songs have never received as much promotion as Kalbeliya dance has got from the government. In the absence of sufficient government initiatives in enhancing the visibility of the rich repertoire of Kalbeliyas' songs, their songs are getting disassociated from their staged dance performances.

The traditional musical instruments, on which Kalbeliya songs and dance were earlier performed, are also gradually getting replaced by other instruments on stage. The use of

dhol (large-sized double-headed drum), *dholki* (small-sized double-headed drum) and *harmonium* (a keyboard instrument made of wood and metal) is now preferred over Kalbeliyas' traditional instruments such as *been/poongi* (a wind instrument to capture snakes) and *chang/daph* (which is a one-sided drum). The former tend to make the whole performance louder and flashy and are traditional instruments of Manganiyars. Kalbeliya performers and Manganiyars often work in collaboration, as it is mutually beneficial for them. The collaboration with Kalbeliya dancers acts as a support system for Manganiyars to keep their tradition of music alive and profitable. At the same time, Manganiyars' mediation is crucial for employment opportunities for Kalbeliyas, as the former have higher social, economic and political capital than Kalbeliyas.

The dress of Kalbeliya dancers has also undergone various changes. Initially, during performances nearby their villages, the dancers wore what they wore in their everyday lives – colourful and highly flared skirts (*ghagra*) with full-sleeved long blouses and *dupatta* (stole). Their dress gradually began to have a black base in order to make them attractive. The black colour is popularly associated with snakes and snake charming which is often described as Kalbeliyas' traditional occupation. However, a very senior Kalbeliya dancer negated any such association and rather claimed that it was introduced by her to make the dress attractive. Influenced by a Bollywood actress, she chose the black colour. In fact, according to her, the black colour was viewed as inauspicious initially in the community. Over the years, their dresses are increasingly made glittery with patch work, mirror work and thread embroidery on the black base. Apart from their dance performances, Kalbeliya women wear colourful skirts and long-sleeved blouses in their daily lives. The jewellery, which dancers wore earlier, was made of *manka-moti* (beads), but they have switched now to oxidized silver jewellery as the latter is more in trend now. The nomination dossier of Kalbeliyas for their heritage recognition had proposed safeguarding their traditional jewellery of beads by organizing exhibitions and workshops wherein Kalbeliyas would be able to show their jewellery and teach people how to make it and sell it to supplement their income (UNESCO, 2010, p. 7). However, these proposals have not been implemented so far (Figure 3).

These changes observed in recent staged Kalbeliya dance performances make them look far from their traditional form or the way dance has been performed at the community level. The tourism-induced changes in terms of the content of their staged dance style, music and dress show that the lives of Kalbeliya performers are marked by hybridity which can be explored further. Like Vedda people from Sri Lanka, Kalbeliya performers also lead a hybrid life: they have a limited set of fast songs and exotic dance styles for tourists' consumption which is far from how they perform in real life (Ranasinghe & Cheng, 2018). The Kalbeliyas' nomination dossier describes the Kalbeliya dance and songs as 'an expression of the Kalbeliya community's way of life as snake handlers of the yore' (UNESCO, 2010, p. 2). However, their staged representations, which are widely portrayed as well as received as the original Kalbeliya dance, fail to express any of that as their performances have become highly standardized and are reduced to the reproduction of a few similar songs and some acrobatic dance steps. Through interviews with locals as well as tourists, one would notice that the common perception about Kalbeliya dance has become limited to some women wearing black dresses and showing acrobatic stunts with no recognition of their songs. Or at the most, they identify it with Kalbeliyas' popular song *Kalyo Kood Padyo*. Unfortunately, Kalbeliya performers partake in such a



Figure 3. Kalbeliya dress worn in the community (left) and during stage performances (right). Source: Author (December 2017).

portrayal of their heritage by participating in the production of these staged presentations due to their economic hardships as well as aspirations to improve their socio-economic status. Owing to their exclusion from their heritage-making process and resulting unawareness about their heritage status, Kalbeliyas view their dance merely as an economic resource to earn their survival or to supplement their income.

Impact on Kalbeliya performers

It is undeniable that the recognition of Kalbeliya dance as ICH by UNESCO and the following tourism development have given wider visibility and popularity to Kalbeliyas and their dance. However, Kalbeliya performers have also been victims of marginalization at different fronts despite their worldwide recognition. Due to their exclusion from their heritagization process, most of the Kalbeliya dancers are unaware of their roles and rights as heritage bearers. Thus, they remain deprived of exercising any power over their heritage safeguarding process. Economically, Kalbeliya performers have benefitted with dance opportunities due to their wider recognition. However, except in the case of a few popular Kalbeliya dancers, the distribution of economic gains remains highly unequal due to the intervention of other stakeholders such as Manganiyars and hotel managers who claim a substantial share of dancers' economic benefits. Unfortunately, a majority

of the Kalbeliyas are dependent on these stakeholders due to their lack of economic, social, political or sometimes even basic human capital such as literacy. In order to improve their economic benefits, most of the Kalbeliya dancers end up participating in the commercial production of Kalbeliya dance in private settings. Socially, Kalbeliya women performers are seen as lowly entertainers, as women dancing publicly is looked down upon within the community as well as outside due to being oblivious of Kalbeliyas' ICH status (Angelillo, 2012). These forms of marginalization are significant to take into consideration, as they have informed the marginalization of Kalbeliya performers at the cultural level limiting their agency over the production and representation of staged Kalbeliya dance, its aesthetic content and the contexts in which it is performed.

Today, Kalbeliya dance, as it is recognized by UNESCO as ICH, survives in the form of staged presentations and most Kalbeliya performers, except a few extremely popular performers, lack control over the content of their staged performances. Initially, the dance was modified by Kalbeliya dancers themselves. However, the repeated reproduction of those new changes only in their staged dance performances has reduced the staged Kalbeliya dance to those few steps only and has led to its standardization. In government programmes, the dancers are often previously instructed about their dance content in terms of which songs to include, how many of them, number of dancers to perform and suchlike. In the absence of such instructions also, Kalbeliyas know what is expected of them and hence perform on songs which are already popular among the audience leading to further homogenization of Kalbeliya performances. Kalbeliya performances are expected to be more sexualized and eroticized in commercial settings. Due to a lack of awareness about their ICH status and to secure their livelihoods, Kalbeliya dancers have become more of passive entertainers rather than cultural custodians.

Another form of cultural marginalization of Kalbeliya performers relates to their anonymization in government-organized programmes as well as in commercial settings. Based on multiple observations of different government programmes or festivals, Kalbeliya performers are never introduced to the audience or their names are never announced. They are usually introduced by the names of their dance parties which are often named after Kalbeliya males or Manganiyar males working in those dance parties. The minimal efforts of even introducing the dance parties are also absolutely missing in commercial settings of hotels or resorts. The introduction or acknowledgement of Kalbeliya dance as India's intangible heritage is also missed at times in government programmes which should ideally act as platforms of its wider dissemination and promotion as heritage. Based on the fieldwork, this was mainly because many government officials in Rajasthan were unaware of Kalbeliyas' ICH status. The government programmes are also criticized by Kalbeliyas for majorly offering opportunities to perform to already popular Kalbeliya dancers at the expense of sidelining the majority of other Kalbeliya dancers. A Kalbeliya dancer disapprovingly said that

Most of us are left for hotels, resorts and weddings. Government programmes are for popular Kalbeliyas. We are never given any opportunity. The government people do not want to take the risk with us even if we perform better than them. (Respondent Y, November 2019)

The attitude of audiences towards Kalbeliya performances and performers further marginalizes the Kalbeliyas at the cultural level. Their perception towards Kalbeliya performances is more of touristy exotic entertainment as most of them are unaware about their

heritage recognition. The audiences are not aware of their traditional dance tradition, and according to Kalbeliyas, the audience would also not be interested in it. The audiences are more enthralled about their gymnastic moves. The insensitive attitude of the audiences towards Kalbeliya performances becomes apparent in commercial settings, where performers are often reduced to or treated like puppets dancing as per the whims of the audiences. The performances are often interrupted by the audiences with their demands of different popular songs. The constant entry and exit of the audiences and the hotel staff from the performance space while drinking alcohol and eating snacks show their disregard towards the performers. The Kalbeliya dance performances seem to serve as the pleasant background to all these other activities for the entertainment of the audiences. The reactions of the audience to performances often involve shouting and whistling which further show their callous attitude. The Kalbeliya performers are instructed to encourage the audience to participate with them in their dance which makes many performers experience unease and discomfort. According to Kalbeliya dancers, they are compelled to do so anyway in order to make it engaging for the audience.

Many Kalbeliya dancers shared their stories of humiliation and even harassment during their performances which included the audience joining them in their dance, ogling them, passing lewd remarks and even touching them sometimes. These experiences were shared by the dancers majorly with reference to their performances in private settings which were considered unbecoming while performing in government-funded cultural programmes was considered as a respectable affair. However, the opportunities related to government programmes are highly sporadic which push most Kalbeliya performers to work in private commercial settings. Kalbeliya performers who work in hotels of the Jaisalmer region are often suspected and rumoured to work as sex workers which marginalizes them socially further. Due to their experiences of humiliation, widespread stigma towards their dance and lack of any respect towards them, most Kalbeliyas shared dislike towards their staged dance and their profession of dance. They wish to escape it but continue with it just to make both ends meet (personal interviews with Kalbeliya dancers, tourists and locals among the audience, and observation of dance performances in hotels of Jaisalmer and Bikaner, January 2018).

Increasing commercial production of staged Kalbeliya dance and the economic returns associated with it have also led non-Kalbeliya girls to learn, imitate and reproduce it. This is relatively a recent trend as underlined by Kalbeliya dancers, and the number of such dancers has risen over the past few years. In Jaisalmer, there are girls from other castes and communities who work as Kalbeliya dancers in hotels and resorts to earn their livelihood. It was alarming to see some Kalbeliyas in Jodhpur being highly critical of government cultural programmes for inviting non-Kalbeliya dancers to give Kalbeliya performances in their programmes sometimes. In Bikaner, a few young girl dancers from other castes learned Kalbeliya dance and have earned good reputation among locals as well as outside. One very famous twenty-four years old Bhawai dancer from Rajput caste (Bhawai is another folk dance of Rajasthan) in Bikaner commented that

I am called for Kalbeliya performances a lot of times in cultural programmes held in five-star hotels and big weddings because people know that I am good at it. There are so many young girls coming to me in order to learn Kalbeliya dance from me. It all comes with practice. Kalbeliya dancers themselves do not take their dance seriously, their performances look very inept and clumsy. They hardly practice and improvise their dance. They just look for short-

term monetary gains. People know about this and they prefer me over them here. (Respondent X, December 2018)

The replacement of original dancers by more skilful and professional performers is explicitly evident in Kutiyattam, Sattriya, Bharatnatyam and Kuchipudi dance forms of India also. This process is also referred to as classicization (Dutta, 2017). Kalbeliya performers are also sidelined by the Manganiyars, mostly in commercial settings and also in state-organized cultural programmes at times. Kalbeliyas' collaborations with them have become more common now. During performances in commercial settings such as hotels and resorts, apart from playing their own musical instruments, Manganiyars also include their singing performances such as *nimbuda nimbuda* (a song about lemons and the wish to get them) and do *jugalbandi* (two musicians/singers performing together and creating a fusion) along with Kalbeliya performances. Manganiyars are constantly present on the stage and perform for a significant amount of time, while Kalbeliya performers come in between for a few dance performances. The Manganiyars refer to themselves as *Kalakars* (artists) and often look down upon Kalbeliya performers while considering themselves superior (personal interviews with a few Manganiyars in Jaisalmer, March 2019). Due to the lesser demand of Kalbeliya music, Kalbeliyas' songs are now majorly sung by Manganiyars and are sung only occasionally by Kalbeliya men or women. Manganiyars only use their own traditional musical instruments, and the use of Kalbeliyas' instruments is completely absent from these performances in hotels. The use of their traditional instruments, such as *harmonium* and *dholki*, has even become common in government programmes (multiple observations of cultural programmes organized by the government bodies as well as in hotels, in between 2017 and 2019).

Conclusion

The inscription of a cultural forms in UNESCO's list of ICH ensures their safeguarding with the involvement of concerned local communities who embody them. However, Kalbeliya community was largely excluded from the process of its heritage creation and safeguarding. Consequently, unawareness about Kalbeliyas' heritage status is rampant within the community which partly owes to their marginalization at social, political, economical as well as cultural fronts. The Indian state has put excessive emphasis on tourism around Kalbeliyas' heritage for its promotion over other initiatives of safeguarding it. Coming from one of the most marginalized sections of the society and being unaware of their heritage status, Kalbeliyas view their occupation of dance as a source of their economic upliftment and hence participate in tourism-induced massive production of staged Kalbeliya performances.

Tourism has a substantial impact on intangible heritage forms and their bearers. It has had both positive as well as negative implications, but the negative effects have clearly overpowered the positives ones in the case of Kalbeliyas. In terms of positive impact, tourism has economically benefitted the Kalbeliyas by creating work opportunities for them, but the economic gains have remained minimal due to the intervention of other stakeholders. Alongside economic gains, commercialization and commodification, as by-products of tourism, have drastically transformed the staged presentations of Kalbeliya dance and singing traditions. Kalbeliya performances have been reduced to a few songs

and acrobatic dance steps in order to keep them attractive, exotic and hence saleable. Kalbeliya songs and singers stand on the sidelines due to their lesser demand in the tourism industry. Consequently, Kalbeliyas have come to known only for their dance today. Their singing and dance traditions practised within the community share no semblance with their staged presentations which also highlights the hybridity that marks the lives of Kalbeliyas performers.

Any ICH cannot be immune to changes, in fact, change is considered as integral to the idea of ICH as its essence lies in its constant re-defining by its bearers or practitioners during its practice in response to changing environments. Thus, the idea of objective authenticity, which is static in nature and is defined in terms of traditions and conventions and which upholds preserving them as it is, is redundant to an ICH form like Kalbeliya dance. However, the process of re-defining or re-shaping of ICH must accord centrality and agency to the heritage bearers. The staging of Kalbeliya dance performances seems to be more tourism-driven at the helm of government bodies as well as private forces such as hotels and resorts. Kalbeliya performers act more as passive bearers with lesser control over the aesthetic content of their performances. Such marginalization of performers and commodification of their performing traditions even pose a grave threat to the idea of subjective authenticity which is more relevant to the ever-changing nature of ICH form and in its safeguarding. Subjective authenticity emphasizes more on safeguarding the practitioners and their ability to express the subjective values and meanings they attach to their heritage freely through their performance (Su, 2018). Contrary to this, in the case staged Kalbeliya dance, the dancers seem to exhibit an authenticity constructed through the discourse propagated by the Indian state around Kalbeliya dance.

The tourism-led limited representation of Kalbeliya dance for public consumption and the cultural marginalization of Kalbeliya performers can be controlled by performers' active participation in their heritage safeguarding process in collaboration with the government (Fu, Kim, & Mao, 2017; Smits, 2014; UNESCO, 2018). Intangible heritage is inextricably intertwined with people as its bearers in the form of manifestations such as their knowledge, skills, language and performance. As Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (2004) also argues, with the advent of ICH, there is a shift in focus from masterpieces to masters who should not only be perceived as objects of cultural preservation but as subjects as well. They function not only as transmitters but also as active agents of their own heritage. However, with respect to the Kalbeliya dance, the dancers fail to act as active agents in their heritage safeguarding and are rather sidelined at various fronts. Being made aware of their heritage status and actively involved in the decision-making process regarding the documentation, transmission and dissemination of their heritage, Kalbeliya performers can move beyond viewing their dance and songs as economic assets and can efficiently safeguard them. The local practising communities often belong to the marginalized sections of the society and hence need to be strengthened with the state playing a supportive role in safeguarding their ICH forms.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Note on contributor

Ruchika Ranwa is a Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Her research interests include cultural heritage, heritage management, dance, gender, state and social movements.

References

- Alobiedat, A. A. (2018). Heritage transformation and the sociocultural impact of tourism in Umm qais. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 16(1), 22–40.
- Angelillo, M. (2012). Caste in the making, dance in the making. *Cracow Indological Studies*, 14, 193–213.
- Baillie, B., Chatzoglou, A., & Taha, S. (2010). Packaging the past: The commodification of heritage. *Heritage Management*, 3(1), 51–71.
- Beardslee, T. (2016). Whom does heritage empower, and whom does it silence? Intangible cultural heritage at the Jemaa el Fnaa, Marrakech. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 22(2), 89–101.
- Blake, J. (2009). UNESCO's 2003 convention on intangible cultural heritage: The implication of community involvement in safeguarding. In L. Smith, & N. Akagawa (Eds.), *Intangible heritage* (pp. 45–73). New York: Routledge.
- Carr, A., Ruhanen, L., & Whitford, M. (2016). Indigenous peoples and tourism: The challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 24(8-9), 1067–1079.
- Chan, C. S. (2017). Folklore without a folk: Questions in the preservation of the Marinduque Moriones heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 23(1), 29–40.
- Cole, S. (2007). Beyond authenticity and commodification. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 34(4), 943–960.
- Dutt, B. (2004). Livelihood strategies of a nomadic hunting community of Eastern Rajasthan. *Nomadic Peoples*, 8(2), 260–273.
- Dutta, P. (2017). Intangible cultural heritage in India: Reflections on selected forms of dance. In M. L. Stefano, & P. Davis (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to intangible cultural heritage* (pp. 230–239). New York: Routledge.
- Edensor, T. (2001). Performing tourism, staging tourism: (Re)producing tourist space and practice. *Tourist Studies*, 1(1), 59–81.
- Finn, J. (2009). Contesting culture: A case study of commodification in Cuban music. *GeoJournal*, 74(3), 191–200.
- Fu, Y., Kim, S., & Mao, R. (2017). Crafting collaboration: Conflict resolution and community engagement in the Hangzhou arts and crafts museum cluster. *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, 12, 60–77.
- Joncheere, A. (2015). Intangible inventions: The Kalbeliya gypsy dance form, from its creation to UNESCO recognition. *Archiv Orientalni*, 83(1), 71–93.
- Joncheere, A. (2017). Kalbeliya dance from rajasthan: Invented Gypsy form or traditional snake charmers' folk dance?. *Dance Research Journal*, 49(1), 37–54.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B. (2004). Intangible heritage as metacultural production1. *Museum International*, 56(2), 52–65.
- Kryder-Reid, E. (2018). Introduction: Tools for a critical heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 24(7), 691–693.
- Leimgruber, W. (2010). Switzerland and the UNESCO convention on intangible cultural heritage. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 47(1-2), 161–196.
- Lowthorp, L. (2015). Voices on the ground: Kutiyattam, UNESCO, and the heritage of humanity. In M. D. Foster, & L. Gilman (Eds.), *UNESCO on the ground: Local perspectives on intangible cultural heritage* (pp. 17–40). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Lowthorp, L. (2017). Folklore, politics and the state: Kutiyattam theatre and national/global heritage in India. *South Asian History and Culture*, 8(4), 542–559.
- Moscardo, G., & Murphy, L. (2014). There is no such thing as sustainable tourism: Re-conceptualizing tourism as a tool for sustainability. *Sustainability*, 6(5), 2538–2561.

- Munsi, U. (2012). The changing stage: Chhau as an intangible cultural heritage. *The International Journal of Arts, Culture and Heritage*, 1, 161–178.
- Ranasinghe, R., & Cheng, L. (2018). Tourism-induced mobilities and transformation of indigenous cultures: Where is the Vedda community in Sri Lanka heading to? *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 16(5), 521–538.
- Reed, S. (2002). Performing respectability: The berav, middle-class nationalism, and the classicization of kandyan dance in Sri Lanka. *Cultural Anthropology*, 17(2), 246–277.
- Robertson, M. (1997). *The Kalbeliyas of rajasthan: Joginath snake charmers- An ethnography of Indian Non-pastoral nomads* [PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science].
- Robinson, D., & Packman, J. (2014). Chula in the city: Traditions, translations and tactics in the Brazilian Samba de Roda. In G. Schiller, & S. Rubidge (Eds.), *Choreographic dwellings: Practising place* (pp. 114–137). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Scher, P. W. (2010). UNESCO conventions and culture as a resource. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 47 (1–2), 197–202.
- Schreffler, G. (2012). Desperately seeking sammi: Re-inventing women's dance in Punjab. *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory*, 8(2), 127–146.
- Singh, L. (2017). *Raising the curtain: Recasting women performers in India*. New Delhi: Orient Blackswan.
- Smith, L. (2006). *The uses of heritage*. London: Routledge.
- Smith, M. (2003). *Issues in cultural tourism studies*. London: Routledge.
- Smits, K. (2014). The neoliberal state and the uses of indigenous culture. *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 20(1), 43–62.
- Su, J. (2018). Conceptualising the subjective authenticity of intangible cultural heritage. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 24(9), 919–937.
- Su, J. (2019). Understanding the changing intangible cultural heritage in tourism commodification: The music players' perspective from Lijiang, China. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 17(3), 247–268.
- Timothy, D. J., & Boyd, S. W. (2006). Heritage tourism in the 21st century: Valued traditions and new perspectives. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 1(1), 1–16.
- Timothy, D. J., & Nyaupane, G. P. (2009). *Cultural heritage and tourism in the developing world: A regional perspective*. London: Routledge.
- UNESCO. (2010). UNESCO ICH representative list: Nomination file no. 00340. Retrieved July, 2017, from file:///Users/sahilnarang/Desktop/kalbeliya%20nomination.pdf.
- UNESCO. (2018). *Basic texts of the 2003 convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*. France: UNESCO.
- Zahira, M. (2014). Folk performances: Reading the cultural history of the Thiyya community in Kerala. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 19(2), 159–164.