

Asset Creation through MGNREGS Convergence: A Case Study of Kaleswar Temple and Park, Purushottampur, Ganjam, Odisha

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Abstract

Modern governance across the globe increasingly emphasizes collaboration and convergence to achieve desired outcomes. Gone are the days when government departments operated in isolation, a siloed approach that often failed to address the complexities of contemporary governance. In India, administrators have adopted innovative and integrated approaches to overcome these challenges and achieve impactful results. A case study of Kaleswar Temple and Park in Ganjam District, Odisha, exemplifies this model of convergence. Situated in the Purushottampur block, the 17th-century Kaleswar Temple became the focal point of a visionary rural tourism circuit. By pooling resources from the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), State Finance Commission (SFC), Central Finance Commission (CFC), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), and contributions from the local community, the project successfully transformed the area into a sustainable tourism destination with an investment of Rs 2.53 Crores only. Governments often face criticism for lacking innovation and integrated approaches to challenges. However, this initiative demonstrates how governance and administrative commitment can converge to deliver sustainable results. Development thrives when stakeholders feel a sense of ownership. The author, serving as the Block Development Officer of Purushottampur block, played a key role in implementing this project, showcasing how such models can drive impactful governance.

Mgnrega, one of India's largest social welfare schemes, aims to enhance livelihood security by providing at least 100 days of wage employment to rural households. As India works towards the vision of Viksit Bharat @ 2047, studies like this offer valuable insights into good governance, integrated policy approaches, and sustainable development, highlighting the importance of optimizing resources for citizen-centric governance.

Keywords: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), Convergence, Asset Creation, Good Governance, Rural Tourism Circuit, Integrated Approach.

INTRODUCTION

Modern governance is increasingly driven by collaboration and convergence to optimize resources and deliver impactful results. The days of isolated departmental functioning are behind us, and governments worldwide are moving towards integrated approaches to tackle complex challenges. In India, such convergence models are essential, particularly in rural development. The 29 functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), outlined in the Eleventh Schedule of the Indian Constitution through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, empower local self-governments to promote decentralized planning and development. These functions encompass key areas such as agriculture, land reforms, water management, animal husbandry, fisheries, forestry, and small-scale industries. PRIs also focus on rural housing, drinking water, sanitation, roads, rural electrification, and non-conventional energy sources. Social welfare responsibilities include poverty alleviation, education, health, women and child development, welfare of weaker sections, and the public distribution system. Additionally, PRIs manage cultural activities, markets, libraries, and community assets, ensuring holistic rural development. These functions aim to strengthen grassroots governance and empower rural communities. The Ganjam District

Administration and Purusottampur Block Administration have wisely chosen the historic place of pilgrimage to create asset through the convergence. Kaleswar Temple and Park in Ganjam District, Odisha, serves as a shining example of how resource pooling and community participation can create sustainable assets. By combining resources from multiple government schemes, including the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), and contributions from local stakeholders, Kaleswar Park was transformed into a rural tourism circuit around the 17th-century Kaleswar Temple. This initiative not only preserved cultural heritage but also created avenues for rural economic development and tourism.

Learning Objectives

To understand the significance of convergence in governance for asset creation and community development.

To explore the role of MGNREGS and other government schemes to provide infrastructure development for creating a new initiative called 'Rural Tourism Circuit' improving socio-cultural and economic needs of the local community.

To highlight the importance of community participation and stakeholder ownership in governance project viz., Kaleswar Park Development.

Background

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), 2005, stands as a transformative piece of legislation aimed at alleviating rural poverty and unemployment through the provision of guaranteed wage employment. The Act mandates at least 100 days of unskilled manual work annually to every rural household whose adult members volunteer for it. It is a paradigm shift in governance, intertwining social security with rural development, and empowering marginalized sections of society, especially women and Scheduled Castes/Tribes.

The operational framework of MGNREGA is implemented through the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS), an ambitious initiative that integrates decentralized planning and community participation. MGNREGS focuses on creating durable assets such as water conservation structures, irrigation facilities, and rural infrastructure, aligning with sustainable development goals. This initiative showcases a democratic ethos by fostering accountability and transparency through mechanisms like social audits and a robust management information system (MIS). Nevertheless, the scheme's impact is multifaceted, viz., it reduces rural-urban migration, promotes financial inclusion via direct benefit transfers, and revitalizes local ecosystems through eco-friendly infrastructure development projects etc. MGNREGA and MGNREGS symbolize the convergence of rights-based legislation with inclusive growth, demonstrating how policy can empower rural Bharat and reduce disparities (Ministry of Rural Development, 2024).

In a remarkable example of MGNREGS's transformative potential, the Kaleswar Temple Project in Ganjam district, Odisha, demonstrates how rural development and heritage conservation can converge. The Kaleswar Temple, a 12th-century shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, is located in the Purushottampur block of Ganjam. Despite its deep-rooted religious and cultural significance, the temple remained largely neglected, serving as a place of worship only for the local populace.

Recognizing the temple's potential, the Ganjam district administration envisioned a tourism circuit linking Kaleswar Temple with the nearby Maa Tara Tarini Temple, a venerated Shakti shrine located just 10 kilometres away. This strategic vision aimed to boost the region's cultural identity while fostering rural tourism. Under the leadership of the local sarpanch and with guidance from the block and district administration, a comprehensive plan was crafted to revitalize the temple. Pooling resources from multiple government schemes, including MGNREGS and the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), the project focused on infrastructure development, sanitation, and environmental beautification.

The key features of the project include infrastructure development through the restoration of temple premises and construction of access roads under MGNREGS, coupled with the promotion of tourism by creating eco-friendly amenities such as parking spaces, rest areas, and signage for visitors. The initiative also focuses on livelihood generation by providing employment opportunities through construction work, handicrafts promotion, and sustainable tourism enterprises. Furthermore, environmental sustainability

is emphasized through landscaping, water conservation structures, and sanitation facilities funded under the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM) and aligned with other state schemes. The Kaleswar Temple Project exemplifies how political will and administrative efficiency can turn a neglected heritage site into a vibrant tourism hub. By integrating resources and leveraging local leadership, the initiative showcases the potential of rural development schemes like MGNREGS to catalyze economic growth while preserving cultural heritage. This project not only strengthens the region's cultural and religious tourism but also sets a precedent for replicating such models across rural India, fostering self-reliance and sustainable livelihoods. It is a testament to the power of community-driven development and the transformative impact of integrated governance.

Stakeholders Involved

The successful execution of the Kaleswar Park project involved the collaboration of various stakeholders:

Government Agencies:

District Administration: Oversaw the planning and implementation of the project.

Block Administration: Played a pivotal role in coordinating resources and monitoring progress.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs): The three tiers PRIs viz., Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad facilitated community engagement and resource allocation.

Local Community:

Actively participated in the project by contributing labour and processes of decision-making.

Local vendors and artisans benefited from the tourism opportunities created.

Temple Committee:

Provided insights into preserving the cultural and religious significance of the temple.

Supported the maintenance of the developed infrastructure.

Funding Schemes:

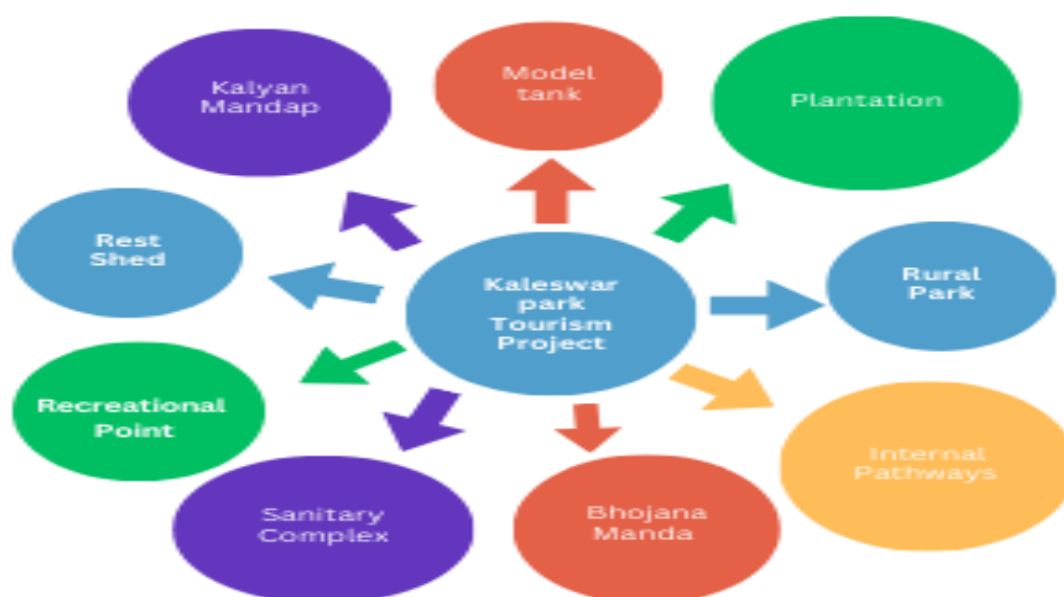
MGNREGS: Provided employment and funded various infrastructure developments.

State and Central Finance Commissions (SFC & CFC): Contributed to infrastructure and beautification projects.

Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM): Funded the construction of a sanitary complex.

Leadership:

The Block Development Officer (BDO) played a key role in driving the project and ensuring stakeholder alignment.



Components of Rural Tourism Circuit in Kaleswar Temple and Park, Purusottampur, Ganjam, Odisha:
A Multi-stakeholder integrated approach

With an amount of 2.53 Crores, and 23 mini-project which integrated itself to become a Kaleswar Temple and Park Rural Tourism Circuit, an innovative plan which could be implemented with multi-stakeholder and convergence approach. The initiatives started in the 2018-19 FY and completed in 2020-21 FY.

Sl. No.	Name of Project	Project Cost (in Lakhs)	Scheme	FY
1	Rural Park at Kaleswar Temple	6.00 Lakh	MGNREGS	2018-19
2	Rural Park at Kaleswar Temple	9.86 Lakh	MGNREGS	2019-20
3	Rural Park at Kaleswar Temple	9.90 Lakh	MGNREGS	2020-21
4	Rural Park at Kaleswar Temple	1.37 Lakhs	4th SFC	2019-20
5	Rural Park at Kaleswar Temple	1.29 Lakhs	4th SFC interest money	2019-20
6	Development of Children Park	4.00 Lakhs	Addl. CFC	2020-21
7	Development of Children Park	3.90 Lakhs	14th CFC interest money	2020-21
8	Development of Children Park	2.66 Lakhs	15th CFC interest money	2020-21
9	Beautification of Kaleswar Temple Tank	9.87 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2019-20
10	Beautification of Kaleswar Temple Tank	9.89 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
11	Bhojan Mandap	9.85 Lakhs	5th SFC	2020-21
12	Construction of Road from Kaleswar Temple to Bhojan Mandap	9.58 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
13	Construction of Road with Guard wall from Kaleswar Temple to Total via Tank	9.69 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
14	Construction of Kaleswar Mandir Bandha Road	9.89 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2019-20
15	Construction of Road from RD Road to Rural Park	9.90 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2019-20
16	Construction of Road from Bada Sankha to Kalyan Mandap	9.84 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
17	Construction of Internal road from Nama Mandap to Children Park	9.6 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
18	Construction of Road from Main Gate to Second Gate	9.34 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
19	Construction of Road from Tank Gate to Kalyan Mandap	9.85 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
20	Avenue Plantation of Kaleswar Mandir Tota Road and Park Premise	1.51 Lakhs	MGNREGS	2020-21
21	REST SHED	3.00 Lakhs	Addl. SFC	2020-21
22	Sanitary Complex	3.00 Lakhs	SBM	2020-21
23	Kalyan Mandap	30.00 Lakhs	SFC	2019-20 2020-21 2021-22

Key Components of the Project
Model Tank

A centerpiece water feature that enhances the park's aesthetics and contributes to ecological balance. This was funded under the MGNREGS scheme, which played a crucial role in supporting infrastructure development.

Kalyan Mandap- A multi-purpose hall for hosting social gatherings, cultural programs, and community events, promoting heritage and unity. This was one of the significant components funded during 2019-20, demonstrating the use of financial resources for community-driven infrastructure.

Rural Park- A dedicated area showcasing rural traditions and practices, offering visitors an authentic glimpse into local heritage. The development of this park was prioritized over multiple financial years:

₹6.00 Lakhs (2018-19) under MGNREGS. ₹9.86 Lakhs (2019-20) and ₹9.90 Lakhs (2020-21) under the same scheme. These funds reflect the focus on preserving cultural identity while fostering tourism.

Sanitary Complex- Essential infrastructure to ensure hygiene and convenience for visitors. Funded by 4th SFC Interest Money (₹1.29 Lakhs) in 2019-20, this component highlights the commitment to visitor comfort.

Internal Pathways- Well-maintained pathways connecting various sections of the park, ensuring accessibility and ease of navigation. Developed under the 4th SFC scheme (₹1.37 Lakhs) in 2019-20, these pathways enhance the park's usability.

Bhojana Mandap- A dining area providing traditional and local cuisines, adding to the cultural and culinary experience for tourists. This component reflects the project's integration of local culture into the visitor experience.

Recreational Point- A designated space for leisure and recreational activities, catering to families and individuals seeking relaxation. The development of this component was supported through the funds allocated across the financial years under MGNREGS and 4th SFC schemes.

Rest Shed -Comfortable resting areas for visitors to unwind during their exploration of the park. Like other components, these were funded as part of the broader infrastructure development efforts.

Plantation- Landscaping and greenery efforts to promote biodiversity, improve ecological balance, and create a serene environment. Funded by MGNREGS, this component demonstrates a commitment to sustainability and environmental preservation.



(Fig-2: The Convergence Approach in the Kaleswar Park Tourism Project)

The development of the Kaleswar Park Tourism Project adopts an innovative **Convergence Approach**, integrating various government-sponsored schemes and community contributions to create a sustainable and impactful tourism circuit. This approach ensures efficient utilization of resources, reduces duplication of efforts, and maximizes the project's overall impact.

Principles of the Convergence Approach

Identification of Potential The project's foundation began with identifying the area's potential for tourism and cultural preservation. This evaluation highlighted the need for an integrated infrastructure to cater to the diverse needs of visitors.

Integration of Schemes The proposed projects were implemented by uniting resources from multiple government-sponsored schemes, ensuring that funding and efforts complemented each other. The key schemes utilized include:

MGNREGS (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme): Aimed at providing rural employment while supporting infrastructure development.

CFC/SFC (Central Finance Commission/State Finance Commission): Allocated funds for infrastructure enhancement and essential facilities.

SBM (Swachh Bharat Mission): Focused on creating sanitation facilities to promote hygiene and cleanliness.

Community Contribution: Involvement of the local community to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility towards the project.

Collaborative Execution By bringing together multiple stakeholders—government agencies, local authorities, and the community—the convergence approach ensured seamless coordination in the execution of project components, such as pathways, sanitation facilities, recreational points, and cultural spaces.

Impact of the Convergence Approach

Enhanced Efficiency: The pooling of resources from various schemes avoided redundancy and ensured that each rupee spent contributed to the project's success.

Sustainable Development: Integrating sanitation, green initiatives, and community involvement resulted in an environmentally and socially sustainable project.

Holistic Infrastructure: The convergence approach enabled the creation of a comprehensive tourism circuit, blending cultural, recreational, and ecological components seamlessly.

Governance Strategies Adopted to Make Kaleswar Temple a Rural Tourism Circuit: A Discussion

1. Convergence of Resources through various Schemes of the Government:

A unique feature of this project was the pooling of resources from various government schemes. The breakdown of investments is as follows:

Development of rural parks and children's play areas through MGNREGS, SFC, and CFC.

Beautification of the temple tank and its surroundings, funded by MGNREGS.

Construction of roads, pathways, and other infrastructure connecting the temple to nearby sites.

Establishment of a sanitary complex under the flagship Government Scheme of Swachh Bharat Mission.

Construction of the Kalyan Mandap, used for community events, funded by SFC.

2. Community Participation

Community involvement was a cornerstone of the project. Local labour was employed under MGNREGS, ensuring wage generation for rural households. Contributions from the local community and temple committee enhanced a sense of ownership, ensuring long-term sustainability.

3. Infrastructure Development

Key projects included:

Renovation of the temple tank into a model park with walking tracks and boating facilities.

Development of a children's park with play equipment and a green corridor.

Construction of internal and approach roads to improve connectivity and accessibility.

Establishment of a Kalyan Mandap for community events, providing a source of income for the temple committee.

4. Revenue Generation

The project not only focused on infrastructure but also on creating income streams. User fees from the boating facility, Kalyan Mandap rentals, and visitor entries generated substantial revenue, estimated at ₹50 lakhs annually. This revenue supports the maintenance of the infrastructure and benefits the Gram Panchayat.

5. Livelihood Opportunities

The project created direct and indirect livelihood opportunities, including:
Employment under MGNREGS.

Opportunities for local vendors to cater to tourists.

Revenue for small businesses operating near the temple.

6. Sustainable Tourism Model

The Kaleswar Park project demonstrates how rural tourism can be developed sustainably. By focusing on preserving cultural heritage, involving local stakeholders, and ensuring financial viability, the initiative serves as a replicable model for similar efforts elsewhere.

CONCLUSION

The Kaleswar Park Tourism Project reflects a well-planned approach to developing a comprehensive tourism destination. By integrating essential components such as recreational areas, dining facilities, cultural spaces, and ecological elements, the project caters to a diverse audience. Its phased execution, supported by schemes like MGNREGS and 4th SFC, showcases the efficient utilization of funds to create a sustainable and impactful public space. This initiative not only enhances tourism but also fosters community development and preserves cultural heritage.

The transformation of Kaleswar Temple into a rural tourism circuit underscores the power of convergence in governance. By integrating resources from multiple schemes and involving the local community, the project not only preserved a historical site but also created a sustainable asset for economic growth and tourism.

As India moves towards achieving its vision of *Viksit Bharat @ 2047*, such initiatives offer valuable lessons in good governance, resource optimization, and citizen-centric policy implementation. The success of the Kaleswar Park project highlights the importance of innovation, stakeholder ownership, and sustainable development in bridging gaps and addressing rural challenges.

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