

World Heritage Site - Majuli



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Rituparna Goswami Pande 7 February 2008 20976 views

To be or not to be a heritage site.... is the dilemma persering Majuli -- the largest river island in the world. The Centre seems to be at its wits end on deciding the status of Majuli island. The Centre has once again renominated Majuli island for inscription in the World Heritage Site List under the 'Cultural Landscape'. After losing the battle in 2006 Majuli is once again back with a bang this year.

The surprise announcement came yesterday even as Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi declared that the Rs 20 crore sanctioned by the planning Commission in Delhi for the river island would not be spent on flood control measures but for preservation of the heritage sites.

Majuli occupies an area of about 422 km², having lost significantly to erosion. The island is formed by the Brahmaputra river in the south and the Kherkutia Xuti, an anabranh of the Brahmaputra, joined by the Subansiri river in the north. The island is about 200 Kilometres east from the state's largest city — Guwahati, and is accessible by ferries from the town of Jorhat. The island was formed due to course changes by the river Brahmaputra and its tributaries, mainly the Lohit. Majoli is also the abode of the Assamese neo-Vaisnavite culture.

Majuli has been the cultural capital and the cradle of Assamese civilization for the past five hundred years. The satras set up preserve antiques like weapons, utensils, jewellery and other items of cultural significance. Pottery is made in Majuli from beaten clay and burnt in driftwood fired kilns in the same mode carried out by the peoples of the ancient Harrappan Civilization. Sociologists have stressed on the preservation of these unique peoples, whose culture and dance forms are untouched by modernism. The handloom work of these tribes is also internationally famous.

Virtually every single person on the island is involved in the three-day

long 'raas' festival, depicting the life of Krishna. People from hundreds of kilometres away come to celebrate this festival including a number of expatriate members of community. The satras have also honed certain art and craft traditions, which can now be found only here. In Natun Samuguri satra for example, one can still find the craft of mask-making; and in the Kamalabari satra the finest boats are made.

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) that acts as the nodal agency for nomination of Indian sites on the world's heritage list has already chalked out a detailed document and has submitted it for consideration of world heritage Committee at its next meeting to be held at Quebec City Canada in June 2008.

Special measures has been taken while preparing the document with consultation with a number of field agencies including those under the Ministry of Water resources and the Government of Assam.

Mentionably, India presently has 27 World Heritage Sites, 22 being cultural and five natural.

Lets keep our fingers crossed for Majuli this time and hope that it succeeds in making its way to the List of World Heritage sites, a status which will not only further enrich its position but also ensure its preservation from further erosion and damage by natural forces.

Photo: www.majuli.org

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