THE GOKARNA GAMBLE
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AUTHENTICATION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the work incorporated in this report entitled “THE GOKARNA GAMBLE” submitted by the undersigned research team was carried out under my mentorship. Such material as has been obtained from other sources has been duly acknowledged.

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Shankara, Rudra, Agni, Bhairva, Ishan, Creator, Preserver, Destroyer- these are all words that are synonymous with the revered Hindu god Śiva. Lord Śiva is considered to be one of the most feared and powerful gods and his being is wrapped in mystique. Contrary to the beliefs of other cults and sub-cultures, the Shaivites (a sect of Śiva followers) consider Śiva to be the embodiment of the holy trinity of Hinduism. He is believed to be the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer of the universe and his worshippers assign roles of lesser significance to Brahma and Vishnu who are believed to be the Creator and the Preserver respectively by other Hindus. Apart from playing out these pivotal contradictions, Lord Śiva’s personality itself is riddled by paradox. He is portrayed as the ascetic and the lover, an epitome of benevolence and a towering inferno, the mendicant and the Tantric, the masculine power (Śiva) and the female energy (Shakti), as being constantly ithyphallic and as one in the deepest meditation; an endless number of other contradictory traits are found in this one Supreme Being.

In Gokarna (located in the northern part of Karnataka), the Mahabaleshwara temple forms the axis of the town and the very beginnings of the town. The spirit of Gokarna itself seems to arise out of the power of the Ardanarishwar (a form of Lord Śiva who is half male and half female).
The presence of such a strong belief in the Lord is extremely overt and cannot be ignored. The town seems to embody and harness the spirit of Lord Rudra and it too exists in contradictions.

In this report, we would be approaching the town as a model of Lord Śiva (depicted in the photos alongside) and look at the various divisions of space as each face of the trinity that is the Lord himself. As has already been mentioned, space division in Gokarna is of great significance to this report and hence, the frameworks applied focus on the cultural along with the geographical aspects of the different spaces in the town. Different subcultures would be analyzed, understood, along with the geographical spaces they occupy.

Through our analysis, we would be arriving at the roles that different spaces play. These roles would draw upon the metaphor of multifaceted character of Śiva - the Creator, the Preserver or the Destroyer. Spaces, and therefore the existing subcultures would contribute to the creation, preservation or destruction of the overarching culture of Gokarna. The evolution of these spatial subcultures would also be studied pre and post globalization. However, it should be mentioned that the roles of creation, preservation and destruction, in this report, are not assigned either positive or negative connotations.
1.1 Globalization:

Globalization is the process by which regional economies, societies and cultures become integrated into a global network through improved systems of communication, transportation and trade. Economic globalization is defined as the integration of national economies with global economic systems through primarily trade and political policies. In India, liberalization of the economy and economic globalization occurred in 1991 and is viewed by many as a turning point in the contemporary history of our country.

In terms of Gokarna and this report, we would be looking at Gokarna over a period spanning from 1990 (pre-globalization) to 2011 (post-globalization). From our pre field work research and on-field work, it could be seen that the tourism industry began burgeoning approximately fifteen – twenty years ago. In this report, we will be exploring the possible role that globalization had to play, if any, in shaping Gokarna as we know it today. We will be looking at the conditions prevalent in 1990 that could have been crucial in making Gokarna conducive to the changes it underwent and the resultant town today. The report focuses on mapping the changes in Gokarna by studying these conditions and if globalization was a catalyst in activating these conditions. To further enable the analysis in this report, we employ Immanuel Kant’s “Conditions of Possibility” framework.

1.2. Conditions of Possibility:

“A condition of possibility is a necessary framework for the possible appearance of a given list of entities.”

- Immanuel Kant

To further explain the statement above, Kant gives the example of a cube created by an artisan. According to him, a cube is a three-dimensional entity and therefore, an extended object. For an extended object to exist space needs to exist. Hence, space becomes a condition that makes the

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existence of the cube possible. However, it should be noted that space is not the cause for the existence of the cube but the artisan is the cause and that space and the cube are distinct entities.

In this report, the cube would be a representation of Gokarna itself and space would stand for the various conditions that were present, but not active in 1990 but which were activated after 1991, and continue to be essential for Gokarna to exist as it does today. Space would also stand for the conditions prevalent today that support and sustain the town currently. Some of the conditions that we would take into consideration are the lax law enforcement, the lack of historical documentation, the overpowering presence of the Mahabaleshwara temple, the influx of pilgrims (pre-globalization) and tourists (post-globalization), the ecological diversity of Gokarna and other key conditions in shaping Gokarna. These conditions will be applied in terms of space and taking into consideration globalization as a catalyst. The conditions of possibility then would be a tool, to analyze the effects of globalization (that acts as a catalyst), in determining the roles of different subcultures and spaces as creator, preserver and destroyers. In this report, we aim to answer our research question as holistically as possible: **How have the paradoxes of Śiva interacted with the forces of globalization in shaping the geographical and cultural spaces of Gokarna?**

By drawing a comparison between the spaces in Gokarna and Śiva’s multidimensional character, we would be able to assess the effects the aforementioned conditions have had on the culture of Gokarna, as a whole. The aims of each condition listed below serve to clarify the framework and objective of this study.
1.3 Focus: Space

Space is mathematically defined as an area with one, two or three dimensions. Space, however, often has geographical (in terms of area, cartography) and cultural (in terms of the social structures, rituals, practices, customs) connotations attached too. These geographic or cultural spaces are further sub-divided into certain smaller spaces. This division may be either blatantly visible or covert. The formation of space could be on the basis of geography, ethos, ethnicity, rituals and other factors. More often than not, every space develops its own social attitudes and soon the people in those spaces begin to be defined by this culture. Cultural spaces are made up of the interaction of people present in these spaces. These people may share common backgrounds; customs, beliefs, practices and they also follow a common set of norms.

Gokarna like all other towns and societies consists of many spaces. These spaces are not overtly defined and there are grey areas. However, the presence of different cultural spaces is evident. In this report, a large part of the focus would be on defining the existing spaces and the systems operating within them. It would also study the interaction within and between the spaces in terms of physical boundaries as well as the people. Like many other cultures, these subcultures form certain perceptions and stereotypes about people from other spaces. These perceptions are both implicit and explicit. Sections of the report would focus on these perceptions and study them in some depth.
1.4 Spatial Structures Reflected

India is culturally famous, and hence tremendous knowledge is available about its cultures and towns; hence, it’s surprising when one stumbles upon an Indian town that hasn’t been heard of before. In such a case, several questions appear; primarily, what makes this town unique, why has this town been left unexplored, what are the crucial factors contributing to these aspects of uniqueness and isolation? Gokarna, thus, as a town is vastly undiscovered and these aforementioned possibilities at first sight were endless. Hence we decided to go ahead with a holistic approach in order to fulfil the aims of our project. This holism also ensures that we tackle a variety of themes within the main framework of space and subcultures.

One of the predominant themes is the prevalence and representation of temples. Gokarna, we found, is wrapped in myths and tales, some striking and some contradictory. These myths were kept alive by the main monument of the town; the temples that serve as a central requirement to an entity as powerful as the atmalinga. It is commonly seen that wherever one associates a force of immense spirituality and faith, one begins to associate its temples with grandeur and patronage. We begin to visualize tall scaling towers and mammoth structures. Hence, with regards to the architecture of the town our aim is to understand how a term such as culture, which is imbibed within each one of us, is represented in the physical world. Does something with a tremendous amount of spiritual empowerment get its due in terms of its representation to the world?

Along with architecture, the ecology of a place forms an important part in its representation of a culture to the world outside. One’s internal thoughts, behaviour and ideas are reflected in their immediate surroundings. Similarly, with regards to the ecology of Gokarna we aim to determine the correlation between the treatment of the physical ecological space and the cultural thoughts, ideas and attitudes, along with its possible implications on the spatial subcultures.

Since these spatial subcultures keep evolving, it is but natural that a culture (in totality) undergoes variations not just in terms of its physical representation, but also with regard to its history. Archives, Gazetteers and history textbooks provide the answers to all the questions that are to
do with kingdoms, empires and even small towns – however, when it came to the documentation of Gokarna, we were left stumped. There was hardly any information that could be validated with regards to rulers or battles. History was also often substituted with myth. Subsequently, with regards to the origins of Gokarna, we aim to highlight the importance of this lack of valid information, along with the dominating role played by the myths.

The lack of valid historical documentation then presents other challenges in a small town like Gokarna such as the administrative set up. In order to understand implicit and explicit laws imbibed in the culture of Gokarna, we seek to understand the differences in administration post globalization and whether the structural set ups of the administration of the town changed, or was modified by an influx of foreign tourists.

With all these aims, our project would still remain incomplete if we did not analyze the impact of globalization. Gokarna, being a temple town, has a particular profile with primary occupations associated with rituals and Sanskrit studies. We aim to showcase the effect that globalization had - if any, on a town which has been rooted in its religious practices. Along with this, we also aim to explore whether globalization has actually stained almost every nook and corner of earth (in the context of Gokarna) as many claim it has.
2. METHODOLOGY

Before the field trip, very little relevant information was available for purposes of preliminary research. Combing the Internet for scraps of information seemed futile because the only form of resources available were travel blogs written by poorly informed tourists. However, on closer study and by going through the Deccan College library with a fine-toothed comb, we were able to procure more reliable and substantial information. Certain books containing references to Gokarna were useful in forming our rough research framework. These references also provided us with different perspectives of Gokarna, as seen through the lens of different cultures, over different time periods. Along with helping us understand Gokarna roughly, these documents also gave us something crucial: Gokarna was documented for its myths connected with the Atmalinga. Information about the history, the cultural profile of the indigenous population was sparse. Subcultures were not given any importance, there seemed to be a curious lack of information on the place, its geography and its various cultural practices. Filling in the gaps within this information, we realized, was an important task. Thus the focus for our field work research was set: discover Gokarna wholly, scour the town for its various subcultures, understand the indigenous population, their lifestyles and more importantly, understand the relations between these different cultures existing within the town.

During the field work, care was taken to divide the task of gaining information amongst the 11 of us. We divided ourselves into groups of 3 people, with each group assigned a particular theme/themes. In order to cover the most area possible, on our first day, we set out to just walk around the town, its beaches and the outskirts. This exercise enabled us to familiarize ourselves with the different parts of the town geographically. While doing so, we were also able to associate different spaces with particular groups of people; this gave us an insight into the cultural diversity of the town. We were also able to identify the spaces on the basis of occupations and livelihoods; for instance, the Car Street was the main commercial street, housing shop keepers selling religious and tourist paraphernalia, while the Beaches were characterized by shacks run primarily for the tourist population.
Based on these observations, we arrived at the specificities associated with the location of Gokarna. Gokarna (as mentioned earlier) is located in the Northern part of Karnataka, in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka.

Gokarna lies between the Gangavali and Aganashini rivers, and is situated along the Karwar coast. It is further bordered by Arabian Sea on one side and the Western Ghats on the other. Gokarna’s location makes it one of the holiest destinations in India: the confluence of the Arabian Sea and three rivers – Gangavali, Aganashini and Siddeswara, is believed by the Brahmins and pilgrims alike, to be the optimal combination to attain moksha (freedom from the cycle of rebirth).

Demographically, Gokarna has a population of around 12500 residents, although a large influx in population – about 500,000 pilgrims - is observed during the Śivaratri period (a festival celebrating the birth of the Hindu God Śiva, usually held during the last week of February and the first week of March). The main language spoken is Kannada, while the secondary languages are English, Marathi and Hindi.

In geographical terms, Gokarna is a fairly small town with an area of 10.9 square kilometers. The nearest town is Karwar at 59 km and the nearest city is Mangalore, Karnataka at a distance of 240 km. There are five main beaches – Om, Kudle, Half moon, Full moon (often known as Paradise) and Gokarna. For a small town, Gokarna boasts of 140 temples, with the Mahabaleshwara temple being the main one. This temple

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3 Information gained through the local Gram Panchayat
contains the famous atmalinga (literally translated as the ‘Soul of Śiva’; a stone structure in the form of a stylized penis which is a representation of Śiva).

Based on this primary information gained on the first day (except the map which was acquired through secondary resource), we divided the areas to be covered amongst the different groups. This was done to ensure that the areas assigned to the groups did not overlap on the same day; this helped each group tackle their themes on a wide geographical area. This division was further useful when we assembled every night, as a group, to narrate our findings to each other. During these group discussions, each sub groups’ observations and discoveries were reflected upon; these discussions helped us find the linkages between the different themes too. Moreover, the information discussed during these meetings were verified and cross checked by different groups in order to arrive at a coherent primary data collection process. The information gained from one person, was verified by asking similar questions to other people of the same subculture; for instance, the information provided by one of the shopkeepers in Car Street was cross checked and verified by asking similar questions to about 20 other shopkeepers on the same commercial street. This exercise was carried out with every single subculture: the Brahmins, the indigenous population, the religious institutions like the Maths, the foreign tourists, the pilgrims, the migrants, the higher end, commercial institutions, police officers, teachers and the Gram Panchayat. This helped us attain a diverse, yet coherent information base.

It is primarily due to this process that we were able to identify divisions in space as the binding factor to explain the existence of different communities within one town. These divisions in space, apart from explaining the respective subcultures, also enabled us to identify the relationships between these subcultures, their interactions and perspectives. It further enabled us to link our pre field work research with our findings on field, thereby providing us with a strong base for analysis and interpretation of the data. As demonstrated in the following section, our on field research played a crucial role in coherently formulating our discovery (in as unbiased a manner as possible) and comprehension of Gokarna.
3. ANALYSIS

"Coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire."

Jacques Derrida

Gokarna is a town mired with contrary sub-cultures, which form an easy confluence and exist simultaneously. As mentioned previously, in this report we would be studying the impact of globalization on shaping Gokarna into the place it is today and would be using Kant’s Conditions of Possibility as a tool to do so. Many of these conditions were vital in facilitating the co-existence of these contradictions.

For the purpose of this report, globalization in Gokarna is understood primarily, as the influx of foreign tourists to Gokarna post 1991 liberal reforms in India. On a secondary level, globalization is also viewed as the change in local attitudes caused by the influx of these new, foreign cultures. The conditions below would study these changes, the forces behind the change and their impact on Gokarna as a whole.
3.1. Mythical History

Before going to Gokarna, we had gaps in history, sudden jumps in centuries and hardly any factual documentation about this temple town. There was hardly any coherent, validated information on its history. References to Gokarna were to be found in mythical books, or ancient Indian texts. These references revolved around the main theme of the Atmalinga.

The history of Gokarna thus, is ambiguous. Even though it is one of the centres of Sanskrit studies, the Gokarna libraries do not have any historical, factual reference of the city. Gokarna is mentioned in Kalidasa’s (an ancient Indian poet) famous epic, Raghuvamsha which carries the sacredness of the place back to 7th century CE. There are accounts of Dr. John Fryer, an early traveller to India who visited Gokarna in 1675. He believed that Gokarna “is of such repute for its sanctity and meritorious nature that, for a pilgrimage hither, all sorts from the remotest parts of India come in shoals.”

Gokarna has also been mentioned in lots of mythological texts. In Ramayana (an ancient Indian mythological text), there is a mention of sage Bhagirathi coming to this place and practicing asceticism on account of being childless for a long time. Mahabharata (an ancient Indian epic) and various Puranas (ancient sacred Indian texts) all mention Gokarna as a religious place.

The Brahmin priests of Gokarna however, believe that Mayurverma (345 – 365 CE) of the Kadamba dynasty ordered the construction of a Śiva temple in Gokarna. Mayurverma wanted to gain knowledge of the Vedic rites and the Ashwamedha Yagna (a horse sacrificial ritual), so he travelled to Kanchipuram, But on reaching there, he was insulted by a guard and angry Mayurverma swore to defeat the Pallavas (the then ruling dynasty). After he defeated Pallavas, he asked a few priests to perform a yagna to maintain his suzerainty over the region. He performed

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this yagna in Gokarna. The famous Mahabaleshwara was constructed under the rule of Mayurverma and has been an important spiritual landmark where the Atmalinga resides even today.

Though the historical facts are few and limited in number, Gokarna has always been wrapped in myths. As mentioned earlier, it has been a small part of the great Indian epics like Mahabharata and Ramayana and has also found a place in most of the Puranas. Most of the myths surrounding Gokarna involve the linga placed in the Mahabaleshwara temple.

One of the most popular myths of the atmalinga in Gokarna is of Lord Ravana. Ravana performed severe penance at Mount Kailasa in order to obtain a boon from Śiva. Śiva, happy with this devotion, agreed to bestow a boon upon Ravana. Ravana was very pleased and asked for an atmalinga. Lord Śiva created the atmalinga from his own heart and gave it to Ravana; this atmalinga was not supposed to be kept on the ground until the final destination. The possession of atmalinga by Ravana created alarm among all the other gods. They called Vishnu for help. Vishnu had Ganesha – Śiva’s son, sent to encounter Ravana and retrieve the atmalinga.

On his way, Ravana met Lord Ganesha disguised as a cowherd in the evening. This time of the day called for Ravana to perform his daily rituals of Sandhya vandanam (evening prayers). Ravana therefore placed the atmalinga in the cowherd’s (Ganesha) care and gave him strict instructions to not place it on the ground. The cowherd promised to call out Ravana’s name once the atmalinga got too heavy to hold. As soon as Ravana turned his back, Ganesha called his name three times and before Ravana could respond, he placed the linga on the ground, tricked Ravana and disappeared. Angry Ravana chased the cows but he could get hold of only the cow’s ear as the rest of the body had disappeared underground. It is this ear that is now seen in a petrified form, which has given the name Gokarna to this place. Ravana also tried to lift the
atmalinga but he couldn’t and therefore named it *Mahabaleshwara* (All powerful). *Ravana’s* efforts to remove the linga resulted in his throwing the coverings of the atmalinga to Dhareshwara, Gunavanteshwara, and Murdeshwara and Shejjeshwara temples. These five temples including the Gokarna temple make the *panch-kshetra* (five significant areas).

Due to the prevalence of these myths, Gokarna has always been considered to be of great religious importance. It is believed by the locals that many monumental figures such as Brahma, Vishnu, Rishi Agastya have visited the place. Also, bathing in the *Koti-teertha* here is supposed to cleanse one of any sin including *brahmahatya* (murder of a Brahmin). Having looked at these variations in mythological tales, one of our core questions was focusing upon understanding the existence of the multiplicity of these tales.

While the mythologies provide a very mystic, fascinating picture, it does not provide one with the entire story. Mythologies cannot be verified, they are beliefs, norms of a different sort. They constitute the Indian version of fairytales. Hence, in order to ascertain the true traditions and culture of a particular place, history attains paramount significance. Apart from providing information about the heritage and genealogy of a particular population, history coupled with mythology provides a more accurate framework to understand existing subcultures. With these subcultures are differentiated, it becomes possible to unpack the existing complex layers, understand the cultural variations as it were. By understanding these gaps in history, the culture of Gokarna can be understood in a better light.

Hence, one of our main aims was to try to fill in these gaps, in terms of the historical documentation. However, during our field work, we realized that history does not seem to hold much importance for the populations of Gokarna – indigenous or migrant for that matter. During our field work research, there were various individuals who we questioned regarding the history of Gokarna ranging from the footpath shop owners to the history professor of the only college in Gokarna. There were varied responses but the crux of the findings revolved around the fact that none of them were quite clear about the history of their town.
Mr. G.M Vedeshwar, the private librarian set up his library 72 years ago in Gokarna. He possesses over 1.5 lakh books in his library. However, when it comes to books written solely about Gokarna; he had none. He listed various texts in which Gokarna has been mentioned but none of which have been completely devoted to Gokarna. When we finally did stumble upon a book that was directly related to Gokarna, it was a fifteen-page summary of the various temples and mythological tales that were related to Gokarna.

Mr. G.K Hegde, the history professor of the only college in the entire town, felt that there was not enough about Gokarna to teach his own students. According to him, Gokarna is a small town within the Karwar district and hence, there has never been any direct rule over the town. There have been instances of patronage from rulers such as Tipu Sultan and Šivaji; however, Gokarna was never directly ruled by any King or dynasty of any sort. If anything, only suzerain (A dynasty that controls a smaller state’s foreign affairs, allowing for domestic sovereignty) forms of rule existed, which further explains why the people of Gokarna are not aware of their history. Mr. G. K Hegde further added that one of the primary reasons for the lack of valid historical documentation of Gokarna was due to the existing oral traditions; history was generally passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation and hence, no documentation was required.
This information about the lack of any direct rule was echoed by Mr. Ganesh Joglekar - a member of one of the oldest Brahmin families in Gokarna today. He asserted that since Gokarna was allowed domestic sovereignty, there was no foreign invasion. If anything, Gokarna, on account of being a temple town was always shielded, and Brahmins were given the control of administrative affairs. This made the town Brahmin centric, and hence perpetuated the various myths; children were told about the atmalinga, and not the suzerain forms of rule. They were made aware of the various famous patrons, yet, it was deemed unnecessary to impart information about these patrons’ dynasties.

This intense, arduous belief in religious mythology is echoed in the holy water body of the town - Koti teertha. This water body is used for the immersion of ashes and the morning dip of the Brahmins. No one asks questions as to when it originated or who built the tank around it. All answers again are given on the basis of its holy significance which is again wrapped in various inconsistent myths. If anything, everyone seems to agree upon one ‘fact’ – bathing in this water body cleanses every one of all their sins, including brahmahatya (killing a Brahmin). This speaks volumes about the inherent religious culture of the town. Around the Mahabaleshwara temple, everyone has internalized the myth of the Atmalinga. History does not seem important, or even relevant. Often, history is substituted with mythology; everything that is holy, sanctimonious is held to be true and divine. So, when it comes to the mythological, it has been put up on a pedestal as one would expect in a temple town and the history of the town seems secondary.

These myths attract various sorts of people: Brahmins, pilgrims and even foreigners who are intrigued by Hindu mysticism. Hence the Atmalinga retains its importance at the centre of mysticism and spiritualism due to the fact that whatever is not seen by the eye or is unknown arouses deep curiosity within the individual. It draws one to keep coming back and to keep trying to go deeper into the unknown. This effect of drawing one back time and time again towards the spiritual keeps the philosophy of Saivism intact and thus the cultural framework remains
intact. In terms of occupation, the Brahmins retain their supremacy with regards to the control of the Mahabaleshwara temple. With regards to the foreigners, however, with the advent of globalization a new trend has emerged with regards to mythology. We viewed various paintings that were put up on the walls of different shacks that were painted by foreigners. These paintings depicted various instances in Hindu mythology with a Christian element infused in it.

Thus, the puzzle continues. It has various pieces with dual positions. However, the exact position of these pieces cannot be determined. What can be said though for certain is that myths and tales are predominant. They seem to be revolving around every nook and corner of the town. It almost seems that history has taken a back seat and myth has been the guiding force regarding the telling of the tales of the past.

On account of being a small temple town, no one asks questions regarding the lineage of the town and if someone does then answers are given on the basis of the town’s spiritual importance. The town is called a temple town for a reason- it thrives on its temple and myths that accompany it. It thrives on peoples’ never ending curiosity when it comes to their Gods and it leaves an ever-lasting impression on who so ever visits it.
3.2. Gokarna- The New Goa?

Civilizations undergo tremendous shifts and modifications over the course of their histories. These shifts often become paradigmatic, altering the culture, and sometimes, the associated geographical spaces. For Gokarna, this paradigm shift came to be reflected post globalization. With the liberalization of the Indian economy, Gokarna was slowly getting transformed, not just in terms of its sheer population size, but also in its various cultural and geographical aspects. The wave of globalization also changed people – indigenous, migrant, pilgrim and the tourist populations, their perceptions and their daily lives. With an influx of greater number of people, from a variety of backgrounds, the town witnessed a heightened sensitivity towards certain issues; certain conflicts gained central arena, while some other dormant conditions transpired to become the predominant ones. In order to truly understand the transformation of Gokarna as a whole post globalization, it is important to understand the various sub cultural phenomena in operation.

One of the most important, yet oft ignored indicators is the various names that exist within the framework of a particular culture. Names create identity, and establish familiarity. Furthermore, names also serve as means to granting one the freedom to express his/her own culture. In Gokarna, names, or rather the change of names served to reinforce the presence of a new, different community – the tourists, especially the foreigners. The five beaches of Gokarna before globalization had indigenous names. These Sanskrit (an ancient Indian language) names became anglicized post globalization – for instance, tatte bele became Half Moon beach, beli kanth transformed to Paradise, while, kundi bele was rechristened as Om beach. It is however, not just the geographical locations that undergo this process of transference, the internalization of the foreign culture can be seen in the shack owners on the beaches and the shop owners on the car street. The people who work in these places often have two names – an original name, and a ‘nickname’; for instance, a shop owner referred to himself as Pindari (his ‘original name’) to his Indian customers, while his foreign customers knew him as Rodney (his ‘nickname’). This process of anglicizing the names perhaps, explains the ethnocentric phenomena at its most fundamental level; familiarizing something local by the way of situating it in the foreign context. This phenomenon of course, needs to be attributed to making things convenient too - both, for the tourists and the shack owners.
These changes in names often morphed into changes in deeper cultural beliefs. While the names reflected convenience and familiarity for the different cultural groups mentioned above, globalization also brought about a transformation in the means and types of livelihoods. The area adjacent to the temple, known as Car Street, became the commercial centre of the town. The influx of foreign tourists and their prolonged stay at Gokarna soon after globalization meant that the small temple town now had to provide for the basic essentials of food, clothing and shelter to suit the needs of the foreigners. From this need arose the response of setting up shops all over the Car Street, so much so, that the market at Car Street can be described as being monopolistically competitive.

While the shops at the Car Street sell souvenirs and clothes suited to the foreign culture, the shacks on the beaches are designed specifically to serve continental food and provide cheap rooms. The primary economic functions tied up with the cultural elements make this transition very visible in the society of Gokarna. The response of setting up cultural fixtures suited to the foreigners enforces a bilateral cause and effect relationship: the initial influx of foreigners lead to the set up of new economic operations, these commercialized fixtures customized to foreign tastes then elicit a response in the form of increasing number of foreign tourists at Gokarna. This increasing foreign population, then once again, encourages the continuation of the old commercial shops and the set up of new ones. This cyclical process ensures the continuity of the commercial process within Gokarna.

Car Street
Along with the assured continuity of this cyclical economic process, globalization affects yet another dimension of the societal rubric of Gokarna. The indigenous population of Gokarna was not efficient - in terms of numbers and entrepreneurial abilities – to cope with this sudden demographic shift. The lack of initiative and the late response time by most of the residents of Gokarna left the tourism market open for migrants. So within Car Street, migrants from Hubli, Hampi and Gadag - all the villages and small towns nearby provided the required factors of production: labour and organizational skills. Moreover, the shacks often employ people from Nepal and Iran, who hear of employment opportunities in Gokarna through some contact at Goa. Gokarna, in this aspect, post commercialization, plays the role of an urban centre, gathering its resources from the hinterland, and sometimes from the lower economic class populations from other, lesser developed areas.

However, employment opportunities do not necessarily imply a smooth, stable livelihood. Many of the shop owners and all the shack owners are employed only for four to six months of the year. These six months coincide with the duration of the tourists’ stay – from October until March, till the end of the Sivaratri festival. While most of the shops on the Car Street remain shut for the rest of the year on account of the lack of customers, the shacks can remain operational only during these six months due to the harsh monsoons at Gokarna. These seasonal occupations then necessitate some people to engage in other odd jobs during the remaining six months of the year. The seasonal occupations also imply that most of these people make marginal profits – the shop owners about Rs. 2000 – 3000 per month, the shack owners about Rs. 5000 – 6000 per month. However, the shack owners are presented with further dilemmas with regard to costs every year; the monsoons destroy the property on the beaches, thereby making it necessary for the shack owners to rebuild their property every year. Most of them incur costs of about Rs. 10000 at least, in rebuilding the roofs and the walls of their shacks. In addition to these costs, the shack owners routinely have to pay a specified amount of money to the policemen in order to serve beer; indeed, as a shack owner told us, beer by itself does not provide profits, but indirectly, it brings in more customers and hence more revenue. Often times, these shack owners are also subject to surprise visits by the excise officer from Karwar (the main district wherein Gokarna is located) who regulate their stocks and sales of alcohol.
However, it is not just the various legal issues involved that make their professions unstable; beaches in Gokarna, apart from the Gokarna beach, are located a bit farther away from the main town. In order to access these beaches, one has to often traverse through tricky paths around the hills and valleys. Ganesh, a shack owner at Om Beach (as shown in the picture below), regarded the recent infrastructural development – building proper, accessible roads to all the beaches from the main town – in a negative light. He claimed that this infrastructural development brought in more customers, but it also brought in more instability. Earlier, due to the sheer inaccessibility, his customers used to come in and stay for 3-4 months at a stretch. So this ensured a steady source of income. However, now that the main town and the highways had become accessible, customers resided only for 2 weeks on an average; they could now stay at different beaches in Gokarna, instead of sticking to one. The infrastructural development, thus while benefiting the tourists at large, had taken a hit on the seasonal employment in Gokarna. It had made an already risky job more capricious and volatile.

The stability of livelihoods is an important motif for the people employed in the water sports segment of informal occupations. Jagdish – one such participant in this sector at Om Beach was previously occupied as a tour boat operator and guide. However, this year, with the increasing influx of Indians at the Om beach, Jagdish expanded his operations to include various adventure sports such as Jet Skiing and Banana Boat rides. Earning about Rs. 5000 per month, Jagdish is yet another example of a Gokarna resident employed seasonally. During the months of April – September end, Jagdish subsists on fishing. While it is dangerous to go fishing in the monsoon season, Jagdish ventures out with 7 other people on a twelve day fishing trip at the peak of monsoon. The fish they acquire during this season is primarily sold in Goa (on account of a large, existing market), to a middleman who pays them about Rs. 25,000 as commission. This money is then divided amongst the 8 men, who then manage to make ends meet with this meagre amount during off seasons.
The intense competition for survival amongst livelihoods is evident within all the sections of the informal sector at Gokarna. While the shack owners on the beaches and the shop owners on the car street fight it out through slight product and price differentiations and establishing relationships with their customers by adopting their language and mannerisms, a slightly different phenomenon is observed amongst the flower sellers right outside the temples in the inner town. Often, the presence of a temple in India necessitates the presence of flower sellers within the precinct of the temple. During our first few days at Gokarna, we noticed some women who were dressed differently than the locals; soon we came to know that these were tribal women, from a nearby village named Bijur (Shown in the picture).

These women often appeared at around 8 in the morning, and roamed around the streets of the inner town, searching for possible customers. They were often reluctant to speak, too busy trying to gain customers before anyone else did. When we inquired about them from the local flower sellers, we were told that these tribal women began to invade an already competitive segment of the informal occupation once the pilgrim and tourist population increased post globalization. The local flower sellers lead a tough life – waking up at 5 in the morning in order to collect flowers from the hills, while also ensuring that the domestic housework is handled. They arrive outside the Mahabaleshwar temple by 10 AM. However, ever since the tribal women started to participate in this flower selling market, the local flower
sellers’ lives have become tougher. They are now required to wake up at 3 AM in the morning in order to collect flowers before the Bijur tribal women did – and then arrive at the Mahabaleshwara temple as soon as possible, trying to beat the competition. The Bijur tribal women, on their part, compete just as fiercely, poaching customers, peddling their wares right along with the local flower sellers. All of this cut throat, hectic lifestyle for about Rs. 50 per day. Globalization has brought in more attention and more customers in the form of tourists and pilgrims to Gokarna, but it has also brought with it a heightened struggle for survival, even within the most casual, economically lowest paying professions.

But the picture would still not be complete if we did not describe the other end of the spectrum – the commercialization of ancient Indian concepts such as yoga and ayurveda. Post globalization, Gokarna witnessed two important changes in its landscape. The first one occurred in 2006, with the establishment of Swaswara resort at Gokarna. Swaswara – literally translated as ‘the sound within one’s soul’ – is an ecological venture by the Clean, Green, Healthy (CGH) hotel group. Swaswara claims to be, and indeed is, the first of its kind in Gokarna. It is a resort that is modelled by a Cochin based architecture firm – Inspirations; the architecture plays an important role in merging the nature and the ancient aspects of the ‘exotic' India, i.e. yoga and ayurveda, to provide a complete, holistic experience of India to its customers. For instance, the meditation hall is towered with a blue dome (as seen in the photo above), without any pillars, which creates positive vibrations, helping the individual incorporate various aspects of the environment within his soul. Along with other such examples of ecological incorporation into their everyday life activities, Swaswara also claims to employ as many local people as possible. In their organic farms, they employ the local farmers,
who get paid Rs. 150 per day, instead of the usual Rs. 80 per day. The local people are also employed for other odd jobs, such as cleaning, gardening and maintenance related activities. Although designed to incorporate as much local labour as possible, Swaswara is definitely not designed for Indian customers. The residents in their 24 cottages are usually from France, Germany and Russia. These residents usually have some basic knowledge of yoga and ayurveda, and are also usually above the age of 50. These residents are informed about Swaswara through the various travel agencies in Europe. By tying up exclusively with the European travel agents, Swaswara ensures that its customer base is primarily and specifically only the foreigners. The expensive nature of the resort also ensures that their customers come from a specific income background and maintain the civility and adhere to the decorum at the resort. Moreover, their customers usually opt for the 2 week package deal; Swaswara offers package deals, for instance a 5 day package deal (the minimum requirement) costs about 1200 Euros for a single person and 1800 Euros for a double occupancy. This package is inclusive of their organic meals, the yoga sessions, the ayurvedic lessons and arts class. These lessons are taught by professionals, who engage the resort residents in various activities throughout the day. By doing so, they ensure that their residents are occupied, so much so, that there is no necessity to venture out. By providing for everything within the resort, Swaswara functions very much like a gated community, a phenomenon completely at odds with the rest of the town. Thus, the elite culture of Swaswara forms yet another assimilative part into the culture of Gokarna.

The second important change that Gokarna witnessed in this arena of commercialization was the initiation of a locally based ayurvedic farm known as Ashokvana. This farm/ small business was set up by Devashrava Sharma, a Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh. Ashokvana spans 27 acres, and is located near Swaswara resort. Ashokvana was set up as a small business in 1984 by the son (Devashrava Sharma) of a well known Maharishi in Gokarna. Upon the death of his father, Devashrava and his brother decided to come back to Gokarna and engaged in the only thing they’d been familiar with since their births – medicinal plants. The 27 acre plot is full of rare trees and medicinal herbs, often used in ayurvedic practices for various illnesses. However, the major difference between Swaswara and Ashokvana arises in their processes of commercialization and target audience. While Swaswara is highly commercialized and is targeted towards the upper income bracket of the European society, Ashokvana primarily engages in the manufacture of various syrups and juices with medicinal properties which are sold in Gokarna and northern
parts of India. Their products are inexpensive and affordable by a person belonging to middle income classes. Moreover, at Ashokvana we also realized that Devshrava Sharma’s profit margins were as low as 5% of the total revenue. Moreover, while local workers flocked to work in Swaswara, labourers were hard to come by at Ashokvana. While the labourers were happy being paid Rs. 150 per day at Swaswara, the labourers more often than not, demanded Rs.200 – 225 from Devashrava. While Devashrava’s profits were low, his brother made zero profits. By setting up an ayurvedic clinic within the premises of Ashokvana, Devashrava’s brother examined the locals for their illnesses and provided them with ayurvedic remedies at a minimal cost. His practice has flourished over time, and he gets about 15-20 patients everyday on an average. His son is trained in this similar practice and assists his father when on holidays. However, post globalization, his son, trained and well versed with the various business opportunities presented by Ashokvana plans on expanding their operations in the near future.

Thus Gokarna, over the past 2 decades, has undergone various changes, primarily located and visible in the employment patterns. It has also witnessed a rise in the migrant population that has on one hand, filled in the employment gaps, while simultaneously eroding profits and making the subsistence occupations for the locals tougher and more unstable than ever. Various infrastructural developments while increasing access and trying to create the effects of development equally all over Gokarna has also contributed to increasing the competition within the already crowded employment sectors. Commercialization has brought in money, for sure, but at the cost of changing the landscape and culture of Gokarna to that of a busy, commercial centre, with flowing populations.
3.3. Temple for Tourists

Gokarna is regarded by the local Brahmins as one of the most sacred destinations in India. Shockingly, the entire town is substantiated by myth of this nature sans any historical evidence and the influence of these myths has the capacity to draw two hundred thousand pilgrims every year during the festival of Śivaratri. Gokarna is with the sacrosanct presence of a Śiva Atmalinga in the Mahabaleshwara temple around which the entire town revolves. The myth holds that this is the one of the original Atmalingas, which explains the enormous amount of reverence the temple demands. The power of this is believed, by the locals to have drawn the presence of various gods to come to Gokarna and pay homage to Śiva due to which, the temple town has an astonishingly high number of temples (one hundred forty), each built specifically for these different Śiva worshipping deities.

These Śiva worshipping groups have long existed, and are often known as Shaivites. Saivism (a sub sect of Hinduism consisting of followers that consider Śiva as the most powerful spiritual entity) is a prevalent religious-spiritual ideology that is closely associated with Śiva’s character and beliefs. Śiva as the creator and destroyer puts him at the two extreme ends of the spectrum. Permanently ityphallic (having an erect penis) and perpetually chaste (abstaining from sexual intercourse) provides Śiva with a very ambiguous yet an enduring enigma. Śiva of the Brahminic (Brahman) cult is essentially ascetic and of the Tantric (application of cosmic sciences with a view to attain spiritual ascendancy) cult predominantly sexual. Seemingly contradictory but psychologically logical, the dual characters of an ascetic and lover add further enigma and power to the myth interpreters, attracting hordes of religious followers.

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5 What is Tantra, About.com; Hinduism, retrieved 9th of January 2011 from <http://hinduism.about.com/od/tantra/a/what_is_tantra.htm>
For all the numerous temples built in the honour of Śiva worshipping Shaivites, each has its own Brahmin priest(s) to perform the required daily rituals. This is reflective of the town’s population, as half the town is comprised of Brahmins. The presence of the Brahmins cannot be ignored, when they are seen going about their daily rituals from the wake of dawn, making Gokarna a highly Brahmin – centric religious town. Gokarna is predominantly Hindu with the co-existence of different sects of the Brahmin community (a member of the highest, or priestly, class among the Hindus).

Of the different sects, Gokarna is characterized by the presence of Saraswat Brahmins. The Saraswat Brahmins get their name from their settlement along the banks of the now extinct Saraswati River in Northern India. Around 1000 BCE, the Saraswat Brahmins started migrating as the river started drying up. Once they migrated, these Saraswat Brahmins formed sub communities around different parts of India; Gokarna has a higher population of the Shaivite Saraswat Brahmins. The Shaivites form a predominant part of the population, especially during Śivaratri, giving the town a highly religious character. The festival of Śivaratri here is celebrated with a lot of fervour wherein the Shaivites mostly from the south of the country, come to Gokarna to take part in the religious practices, including that of the rathyatra.⁶

Post globalization, Gokarna has become one of a few unique tourist destinations in the world. It has all the elements required to make it a sedentary vacation spot where one can essentially get re-energized. It has a substantial amount of coastline which is separated by hills and divided into five main beaches namely – Gokarna, Kudle, Om, Half-Moon and Paradise. The last two beaches are primarily occupied by foreign tourists, while the first three present a mix of Indian and foreign tourists. All the beaches form one of the single most important elements in

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⁶ A religious procession wherein a large chariot is pulled around the town carrying images of Siva
making Gokarna the tourist destination that it is; add to it all the hills surrounding the beaches, and one is presented with an entire landscape irresistible to complete devotion.

Moreover, minimal interference by the police provides a whole new level of freedom on the beaches; the more inaccessible the beach, higher the degree of freedom. This would explain why the Half – Moon and Paradise beaches (most distant and highly inaccessible) are mainly populated by the foreign tourists. Tourists on the beach unaware of the police indulge in the intake of various psychoactive substances; this becomes an important element in making Gokarna a tourist hotspot because there are very few other places where tourists can entertain themselves with such a degree of liberty. The beaches here are serene and peaceful which attracts the spiritually inclined people as well on account of the absence of any loud psychedelic parties happening here unlike in Goa due to which, Gokarna offers a lot of solitude for their introspection.

However, this change has been found to have occurred only in the last twenty years or so after tourists became tired of the tribulations associated with Goa such as the exhaustive economic implications and the overpopulation. Most of the foreign tourists, who sought solitude, were informed about Gokarna through the people in Goa; nevertheless, there is a slight apprehension beginning to form among them: as one French tourist aptly phrased it “It’s getting there slowly and slowly but I hope it does not become like Goa”. It was even found that a major five star resort such as Swaswara felt that the oversaturated markets of Goa could not compare to the seemingly untouched landscapes of Gokarna. It might be premature to speak of the problems associated with commercialization as Gokarna has other aforementioned reasons for its popularity.
Ironically, it is this spirituality seeking population that is contributing to Gokarna’s popularity, and eventually commercialization too. Their heightened spiritual endeavours and experiences are often related to other tourists, who then are inclined to visit Gokarna. One interesting individual who only addressed himself as “somebody from Gokarna” is an excellent example of someone who kept hearing about the spiritual significance and rituals (depicted in the photo alongside) of Gokarna and finally made his way there. He later decided, after having visited Gokarna, to continue on this path of spirituality. His family and friends have even agreed to fund him in this endeavour. In this manner, various other interesting people can be found around this town that keep bringing in new insights, and new cultural elements. The effect of these changes can be seen throughout the entire town from the proud Brahmans; who have increased the fees of certain rituals which they perform for the worshippers, to the shack owners in the beach; who have come to appreciate a certain degree of reciprocity among their foreign customers.

Thus Gokarna is characterized by the presence of two distinct groups with a common destination – the goal to attain higher knowledge and vision. While the religious Brahmans and pilgrims seek this goal through the temples, within the sanctum of the atmalinga or through rituals (depicted in the photo alongside), the foreign tourists (especially the ‘hippies’) cleanse their souls and introspect in the beaches. Following their own unique methods of attaining salvation, these groups establish their presence along with their cultural norms and values in the places they inhabit.
3.4. CASTE SYSTEM REDEFINED

Society through the ages has been rife with struggles for power. Gokarna is no exception to this fact. The earliest evidence of such a struggle dates back to the age of Kangavarma, son of Mayurverma of the Kadamba dynasty. Originally, two Brahmin families from Northern India were brought to Gokarna by Mayurverma in order to carry out the rituals and rites of the Mahabaleshwara temple. After the reign of Mayurverma, his son Kangavarma brought in five Brahmin families from each of the twelve different gothras (Lineage or clan assigned to a Hindu at birth). These caused conflicts between the two families already living in Gokarna and the sixty new families. These conflicts mainly revolved around the control over the rituals of the main temple. Fortunately, in Gokarna there exist numerous temples and hence, the families came to a consensus and amicably divided the administrative rights over the temples equally.

However, power struggles and conflicts were not and are not restricted to just the Brahmins. In the days of yore, the Brahmins were considered superior merely because they were highest in the caste system and they used this position to dominate over the other residents of Gokarna.
Also, since there never was a formalized administration system and as the temple metaphorically formed the centre of the town, they were in a better position to abuse the power but this was not to be the case in the years to come.

Post globalization, the administrative systems in Gokarna took on a more structural garb and the caste system too was coming under severe criticism. With these developments, the Brahmins felt that their control and power was in jeopardy and the modes of power assertion made a huge shift from being based only on the caste system to something more economic.

By shifting focus to the basic economic factor like land, the Brahmins could once again reassert their significance in the town. Since the Brahmins had been in Gokarna ever since it was officially set up by Mayurverma, they practically owned almost all the land in the town. When the commercialization process started taking definitive form, the Brahmins began renting out their lands to the local and migrant shopkeepers. From what could be gathered from the local shack owners and vendors on Car Street; the Brahmins often rent out spaces owned by them at slightly higher rates than usual (Rs. 3000 – 9000 per month), especially if these spaces happen to be in Car Street. Since the street is adjacent to the Mahabaleshwara temple, the Brahmins enjoy a predominant presence in this area. This ensures that the migrant shop keepers do not question the rates or in certain cases, the rights of the Brahmins to charge rent.

For instance, Mr. Arjun is a resident of Trichi in Tamil Nadu. He heard of the Atmalinga in Gokarna and as an ardent devotee of Lord Śiva he visited the place. After being captivated by the power of the Lord on his first visit, the town enamoured Arjun and he now spends six months of every year selling handmade artefacts on Car Street and the remaining time he is employed in manual labour in his hometown. He sells his wares on the footpath outside the house of a Brahmin and according to him; the Brahmins are not fair landlords. There is no formal rent agreement and they abuse this fact by threatening to evict him and demand high rent from him. Approximately 33% of his monthly earnings go in paying rent to the Brahmins. This is a story echoed by almost every other vendor on Car Street.
This renting or leasing out of space outside the homes of the Brahmins (i.e. the footpaths) is illegal as they do not own that land; but this is an important means by which they assert their power and superiority over the people of lower castes. Sudipta Kaviraj aptly portrays this phenomenon, when he says, “Governing conventions were internalized by the Indian middle class, for whom control of everyday uses of space was an indispensable part of the establishment of their social sovereignty.” In terms of Gokarna, the “Indian middle class” refers to the Brahmins. Their control over the certain important spaces in Gokarna still provides them leverage in terms of retaining their dominant status in society. Moreover, it is not just the space, but also the contents of the space that the Brahmins control. For instance, shops on either sides of the Mahabaleshwara temple are not allowed to sell certain artefacts such as cigarette holders on account of being ‘impure’ and despoiling the sanctity of the Mahabaleshwara temple. Thus, by citing the ‘sacredness’ of the temple, the Brahmins continue to be able to wield a considerable amount of influence and power within the society of Gokarna.

The most direct effect of this struggle for power is the general ill feelings directed towards the Brahmins by the people of lower castes. Hence, it can be seen that the threats of the Brahmins are not necessarily in their best interests especially considering the fact that most Brahmins supplement their earnings from the temples only through the rent they receive.

It should be noted that this mode of power assertion was made possible only through the influx of tourists in Gokarna; without their demands, most of the shops on the main street would not exist. Much like many primitive economic cultures and contemporary societies, in Gokarna, land has become the most valued commodity and a means of establishing clout. However, at the heart of the economic causes and effects, lies the primal need for supremacy.

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3.5. COVERT CONFLICTS

‘Change means movement. Movement means friction. Only in the frictionless vacuum of a nonexistent abstract world can movement and change occur without that abrasive friction of conflict.’ This statement describes the cultural processes in operation at Gokarna in the current scenario. Post globalization, Gokarna has witnessed an inflow of various communities from different parts of the nation and the world. It has also witnessed changes in administration, power structures and intercommunal relationships. While the increasing density of population has led to an increasing number of interactions between the various cultural groups of Gokarna, it has also led to an increasing amount of friction and conflicts. Some conflicts get resolved over time, while others gain centre stage. Within the community of Gokarna, two such conflicts have become important, displaying distinct ruptures within the societal fabric of Gokarna.

The Brahmins of Gokarna have always been relegated important positions. The paramount importance of the Mahabaleshwara temple has ensured that the Brahmins continue to hold dominant status within the society of Gokarna. The continued observance of the caste system in Gokarna till date further cements their impact on the society of Gokarna as a whole. Due to their prestigious stature, they’ve also acquired the control – in terms of administration - of the main temples of Gokarna, including the Mahabaleshwara, Bhadrakali and Maha Ganapati temples. Considering that they hold the positions of head priests in all these temples, all the significant decisions regarding funds, pujas and collection of money is taken by the Brahmins. These functions provide them with enough power to use and abuse over time, especially since there is no clear challenge to their authority. By gaining the consent of the indigenous population of Gokarna, also established through the caste system, the Brahmins have imposed their hegemonic rule over the various functions of Gokarna.

However, post globalization, a new power structure has been emerging in Gokarna. In 2008, the district court transferred the control of the administrative functions of the Mahabaleshwara temple to Ramachandrapura Math – which is primarily under the control of Sankaracharya. The Maths have existed in Gokarna for a considerable amount of time – some of them were established in the 1930s. Out of these maths, there are

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four main maths (monastic organizations set up by Hindus) followed by the various sub sects of the Saraswat Brahmins: Kashi, Gokarna-Partagali, Kavle and Chitrapur. The maths are proficient in trading and agriculture, and imparting Vedic knowledge to the Brahmin students. The math at Gokarna, however, has been preserved till the present day. Moreover, they continue to seek guidance from Sankaracharya regarding core affairs. The Ramachandrapura Math thus gains centre stage in the administration of different Maths at Gokarna.

Once the transfer of the Mahabaleshwara temple administration to the Ramachandrapura Math was termed effective, all the functions of the temple were formalized; different pujas were outlined, with the procedures and the accompanied costs. Grand pujas could also be organized, leading to greater access to funds, and increased recognition for the atmalinga at Gokarna. In addition to the temple, the Ramachandrapura Matt also seeks to expand its sphere of influence to include the infrastructural development of Gokarna as one of its projects.

This development has been received differently by the different groups of Gokarna. While the other maths at Gokarna perceive this change of events in the positive light, the Brahmins represent the diametric opposite – by resenting this invasion in what used to be their sphere of power. The maths claim that with the entry of the Ramachandrapura math, the corruption of religion by the Brahmins has been curbed to a great extent, and Gokarna, under the guidance of the Ramachandrapura Math, will eventually be restored to its pure nature. They further believe that with access to Sankaracharya’s fame and resources, Gokarna is bound to receive more attention from the other religious and administrative authorities of India. They further accuse the Brahmins of hindering the process of development; for instance the
Ramachandrapura Math initiated the process of reconstructing roads in certain areas of the town which was immediately stalled by the Brahmins citing corruption as the main reason. The Brahmins, on the other hand, believe that religion is being commercialized by the Ramachandrapura Math. By organizing ‘extravagant’ events such as rudrajap (the chanting of the rudras), they believe that undue attention is being bestowed upon the Mahabaleshwara temple by the wrong sources. By fixing exorbitant rates for the pujas, they assert that the access to the temple has been cordoned off to the common man of Gokarna.

While these diametrically opposing forces with their own set of biases engage in a covert conflict, the locals of Gokarna hold silent witnesses to the whole debacle. While the Brahmins were in power, the locals were subject to under the table money extortions by the Brahmins for performing various pujas, sometimes even to see and touch the deity. The money demanded was often preposterous and beyond their means. However, with the Ramachandrapura Math, things haven’t changed drastically. The only marginal improvement in the whole process has been the formalization of the pujas. So while the locals still have to pay in order to enter the temple, this amount is nominal. In addition, they are not subject to various economic based discriminatory practices by the Brahmin priests. They are also not subject to extortions or under the table money laundering. The exploited victims continue to be exploited – just this time around, it’s a part of the official process.

The fourth dimension to this process of conflict emerges from yet another developing subculture – the foreign tourists. While the foreigners are welcome for the various economic opportunities they present, they also bring in their ‘westernized’ mannerisms and culture. These cultural variations do not present hurdles to the locals, or the migrant workers or the maths for that matter. The ‘western culture’ becomes a problem when it comes to the Brahmins. Relegating them to being akin to ‘shudras’ (one of the lowest categories according to the Caste System) on account of their impurity, the Brahmins despise their culture, yet seek to reap economic benefits through their presence in Gokarna. As mentioned before, it is only due to the influx of the foreign tourists that the commercialization process took place in Gokarna; this commercialization provided the Brahmins with additional incomes in terms of rent. Believing them to be internally polluted (on account of their
hygienic habits, such as not bathing everyday), the Brahmins ensure that their access to the temples is restricted. The Brahmins seem to guard their culture, and especially their traditional way of life, more intensely than ever.

With the emergence of the foreign subculture, the traditions have been challenged, and even eroded in certain cases: this erosion is perceived by the Brahmins as a threat to their status in within the society of Gokarna at large. There is an overwhelming need to protect one’s one culture and hence power, by restricting access. This protection is often acquired through the act of rituals. Rituals have an overwhelming aspect of ‘holiness’ attached to them, and hence are considered to be sacred. Thus, by defining their customs along the framework of sanctity, the Brahmins seek to reassert their values, and more importantly their power. This is often easily achieved, since rituals form an important part of the daily routine of this temple town. For instance, during one of the major existing rituals is observed during the festival of Śivaratri. This festival is mostly celebrated towards the end of the month of February (this is mostly dependent on the Hindu Lunar Calendar) in celebration of the birth of Śiva. (The chariot used during the rathyatra is depicted in the photo alongside)

Apart from ensuring the continuity of age old customs and traditions, the Brahmins further seek to assert their power by defining purity through hygiene. By stipulating that devotees have to take a bath before entering the Mahabaleshwara Temple, the Brahmins effectively cordon off the temple area from the foreigners on the assumption that they do not purify their bodies every day, hence they represent polluted minds. The foreigners, therefore, are not allowed into most of the inner sanctums of the temples at Gokarna. Sometimes, power assertion is sought through
trying to force the foreigners to change their appearances to suit the ‘sanctity’ of the town. This antagonistic tendency towards the foreigners’ impurity went so far as to a prominent Brahmin member of the Gokarna community put up a board (displayed in the photo below) asking the foreigners not to wear ‘skimpy clothes’. The foreigners on their part retaliated, trashing the board in the process.

Thus, Gokarna houses the co-existence of diverse communities: the foreign spirituality seekers, the Brahmins and the Maths. All these groups follow their own values and norms, trying to assert their individuality, and in some cases, power. This conflict can be looked at from two perspectives: the conflict between the ideologies of spirituality (including Shaivism) and the conflict between the groups of people that represent these ideologies.

Within the sphere of ideologies, if spirituality and Saivism leaves one with too many unanswered, tangled questions, religion with its set of rigid rules, provides concrete albeit often narrow answers. Religion, however, while seeking to simplify things, often creates multiple sects and sub sects (as demonstrated by the clashes between the Brahmin priests and the Brahmin Maths) thereby creating a mesh of intersecting, yet mutually exclusive identities. Religion is thus, also often competition. With competition, confused, multiple identities become an inevitable consequence. This constant tug of war between spirituality (the foreign spiritual seekers, the sadhu babas) and religion (the Brahmin priests) and between religion (the Brahmin priests) and religion (the Brahmin Maths) is an acute representation of the current scenario at Gokarna
These clashes – though not violent, while simultaneously covert in nature – nevertheless create ruptures within the overall culture of Gokarna. They represent distinct groups and their associated spaces, entities that are constantly treading into each others’ orbits of power and influence. Post globalization, Gokarna has witnessed increasing complexity; with each attempt to adapt to change, there is an emergence of a new rupture. The age old traditions are deeply rooted within the mental and cultural setup of Gokarna, thereby not allowing it to completely transform itself, nor engage itself on the path of modernization and rationality. Ethnic and cultural associations still form an important part of the various sub cultural identities. Thus, in this aspect, Gokarna is constantly tied up in a tug of war between two very distinct aspects of human identity – ethnicity and rationality.
3.6. Lackadaisical Law

Administration goes hand in hand with law and its execution. However, there are other facets that are considered to be of importance— the planning of the town to support the new and fast growing tourism industry and the resultant industries, the integration of the old with the new and so on and so forth. Below, we demonstrate the important role that law and administration has played in shaping Gokarna post globalization.

In Gokarna, on the main commercial street- Car Street, stands a monumental rath or chariot that is used to take the Mahabaleshwara idol in procession around the town during Śivaratri. This rath is manned and pulled by devotees of Lord Śiva. Much like the chariot, the people, especially those involved in administration and law enforcement, man the temple town. These people form the very wheels of the place. Hence, the administration and law of Gokarna (or rather the lack of it) forms an essential condition in shaping the town.

The economy of Gokarna thrives on the tourism industry present there and one of the most important factors driving this industry is the lax law enforcement present especially on the beaches and the areas surrounding it. A police officer, who requested to remain unnamed, was rather candid when he admitted that the law enforcement officers turn a blind eye to the consumption and sale of “light” drugs such as marijuana. He said that drugs such as cocaine and heroin were absent in the town and if they were to hear of people consuming such drugs then those people would be dealt with severely. Also, on further questioning, he said that they do not take any serious action against the shack owners on the beach who sell alcoholic beverages with low alcohol content despite the fact that they do not possess licenses to do so. The police force employs a similar philosophy while dealing with street vendors who sell their wares on the footpath (again without licenses) because they claim to sympathize with them and their need to earn a livelihood.

However, there appears to be a general mistrust towards the police force from the people outside the force. Mr. Chandrasekhar Adi Moole, a member of one of the first Brahmin families to be brought to Gokarna by Mayurverma, said that the police are very susceptible to bribery and hence, are not trustworthy.
Those who bear the brunt of the police officers’ weakness for bribes are the shack owners and street vendors. Mr. Bindu, owner of Nisarg Café on Gokarna beach, attached the rate of bribes according to the crimes. According to him, if they are caught serving alcohol illegally then the “fine” could go up to approximately Rs. 25,000 and in regard to sale and consumption of narcotics the bribe necessary to keep him out of jail could escalate to anything above Rs. 30,000. Understandably, he too harbours an immense dislike and mistrust towards the police.

Ms. Sany, a French tourist, related to us various incidents that occurred in Gokarna during her previous visits. One incident was related to the death of an Australian tourist induced by a drug overdose. The second incident was related to the attempted rape of an American tourist. Investigations, in both these cases, were not carried out in an appropriate manner and the cases were shut with haste. The police, supposedly, even tried to bribe the American lady to keep the case under wraps. However, the lady took the case to the media and justice was served.

Also, the lack of trust in the police arises from the fact that in cases of previous conflicts they have been fickle and switched support from one side to the other depending on their convenience. As can be seen there is a lack of trust in the law enforcement from all sections of the society of Gokarna. However, the lax law enforcement is quite important in the shaping of Gokarna. The minimal interference from the police makes the town a suitable spot for leisure and spirituality seeking tourists. Another intrinsic factor that allows for the slack legal systems is the lack of media in Gokarna. There is no daily newspaper or any other active form of news media. This allows for the police to indulge in these unethical and illegal practices and also provides an escape from reality for the tourists.
In terms of administration, the governing body of Gokarna is the Gram Panchayat. The Panchayat is 13 years old and consists of 33 members who are elected by the local people. According to Mr. Manjunat Janu, Vice President of the Panchayat, the primary functions and areas, which come under the purview of the Panchayat, are health, sanitation, medical facilities and organization of major festivals. He says that after the emergence of foreign tourists the Panchayat has taken strong measures to increase the quality of sanitation within the town. According to Ms. Mumtaz and Ms. Baby, administrative staff of the Panchayat, the main area of focus of the Panchayat is the implementation of the NREGA program. Also, they receive Rs. 6,00,000 as funds from the State Government and the remaining revenues are earned through taxation; the highest taxpayer being the Swaswara Resorts which pays Rs. 1,00,000. Also, they mentioned that the drug sales and consumption has not burgeoned with the influx of foreign tourists. The Panchayat is also responsible for issuing licenses to people who wish to run shacks on the beach.

Administration, thus serves a dual purpose. On a positive note, the Panchayat, along with the local maths ensure that the town is equipped with infrastructural facilities. The NREGA program implemented by the Panchayat further provides jobs to the marginal population, ensuring that maximum number of people have enough for basic needs. It further prevents people from migrating out of the town, thereby keeping the economy of the town intact. However, the lax law implementation by the police forces provides room for corruption and illegal activities such as drug peddling. While the police do not drive out the shopkeepers on the footpaths (ensuring their livelihoods are not disturbed), they also tend to sweep the controversial issues under the mat, so that the town doesn’t acquire a bad reputation. So while their goals of protecting the town’s income and image might be understandable in the short run, these very goals seem to be tending towards creating problems and eroding the town’s image (by likening it to the drug culture Goa) in the long run.

The town is often said to be tolerant, by migrants and indigenous population alike. Tolerance, in India is considered to be an important virtue; it showcases our hospitality, our open mindedness. However, one may see that despite the positive implications of tolerance that we’ve inherited

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9 National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
from our forefathers, tolerance has not done much good for Gokarna. It has encouraged a sense of complacency in terms of understanding one another, in terms of acceptance, in terms of the unacceptability of the illegal ways of life that are now nearly propagated, if not turned a blind eye to, in Gokarna.
3.7. SUBSETS OF SPACE

If one were to look at the physical structure of Gokarna, one might find that it somewhat resembles that of a human body. The “Car Street” forms the back bone of Gokarna; with the crowd of shops and stalls (both tourist and devotee aimed), the Brahmin houses lining both sides of the road and the spattering of temples all across its length. Little paths are found leading off the backbone of Gokarna like ribs to different sides of the Koti teertha, or to the fish market that veers into the less seen corners of Gokarna, despite its importance. There are roads connecting to the bus stop, the hospital and the beaches that lead past temples, little known houses, government buildings and winding ghats. Through the active hours of the day, the Car Street is what links parts of Gokarna to the other, essential to the interconnection and therefore functioning of the place.
1. To Kotiteertha
2. To Gokarna Main Road
3. To Bus Stand
4. Savitri Lodge
5. To Kotiteertha
6. To Kudle Beach
7. MahaGanpati Temple
8. Shivratri Rath
9. Mahabaleshwar Temple
10. Joglekar House
11. To the hills
12. Sweage Tank
13. Prema Restaurant
14. L.P.S. Dandebare School
15. Zen café
16. Amit's Café
17. To Fish Market and Bus stop
18. To Village
1- To Om Beach, Swaswara Resort, AshokVana
2- Gram Panchayat
3- To Bhadrakali High School, Primary Health Center, Main Highway, NREGA Outlet
4- Bhadrakali Temple
5- To Village
6- To Fish market
7- Bus stand
8- Pai Restaurant
9- Venkatraman Temple
10- Subramanyam Temple
11- Kotiteertha
12- Kala Bhairav Temple
13- Naga Temple
14- To Car Street
Brahmin houses are found near the Mahabaleshwara temple, all of them traditional, modest on the outside, but spacious and grand on the inside. Brahmins are housed near the main temples, monopolizing the area and the land around the temples. Often, their extra rooms that are a bit further away from the main part of the house are rented out to the foreigners. There is a careful attempt to delineate the foreigners from their daily customs and rituals. So while economically, the foreigners are integrated into the Brahmin house, they are never incorporated within the cultural rubric of the Brahmin home. Another important distinction between the Brahmins and the locals arises through their spatial structures. The local people of Gokarna live in traditional houses with tiled roofs and bamboo doors. Distinct Konkani architecture is observable. There are many wooden houses also visible. Moreover, in terms of size and grandeur, the Brahmin houses supersede the local houses. This speaks volumes about their economic, as well as social status in society, even today.

The Mahabaleshwara Temple itself is surprisingly not so grand on the outside. It is modest, traditional and lacks the architectural grandeur associated with Śiva Atmalinga temples. In terms of its history, the Mahabaleshwara temple is about four and half centuries old: it was built in 1560. Dravidian style of architecture (The southern style Dravidian temples had its genesis during the age of the Pallavas of Kanchipuram (600-850 AD) and later developed by the Chalukyas of Badami and Pandyas of Madurai) is observed in the Mahabaleshwara Temple. It was the most prominent style used under the Vijayanagara rule. The temple was built with granite stones and has the Atmalinga enshrined within it on a square Saligrama Peetha (pedestal). The 6 feet long Atmalinga is buried in the ground and there is a small hole in the middle of the peetha from where the Atmalinga is visible to the devotees. Apart from the Atmalinga, a stone carving of Lord Śiva, in a standing position is also housed in the temple. This carving is said to be 1500 years old.

In terms of commercial activity, a different sort of spatial and architectural design is observed. Early mornings find Car Street crawling with priests of all ages and sizes walking to various temples, clad in the traditional garb; saffron and white and aubergine hued. The tourist shops open by nine or ten o’clock, around when most foreigners and other outsiders seem to begin to circulate within the town. The shops are basic,
with a small space and most of them peddling their wares on the footpath. It resembles a traditional market of sorts, with a variety of colours splashed in terms of the artifacts being sold. The interweaving of various cultures continues throughout the day, peoples of most races, gender, age and size wandering the road in various ebbing flows until around nine o’clock in the evening, when everything begins to close, darkening the street quite a bit. The early shutdown of the town in no way reflects the state of being of the shacks located on any of the beaches, even Gokarna Beach, despite its proximity. However, with the absence of a party culture, and with the majority of people going to Gokarna in search of peace, most adhere to the growing silence of the night and embrace the serenity that comes with it. In general too, Gokarna is not a place for noise, even on the beaches, unless it is that of drums and bells for a ceremony or a religious procession. People here cheer for their gods alone.

The beaches extend as the arms of Gokarna, marking the coast line. They are well known for being virgin beaches despite the various shacks and campers that have now begun to live on them; in spite of this, they have remained gorgeous. Even within the five beaches, there are various characteristics to distinguish each of them from the other. The Gokarna beach is the town beach. Most visited by the locals and few tourists, it is the dirtiest beach; mainly because of the bad systems for garbage collection and because the sewage run off from the entire town empties directly into the water. The locals, especially the priests, only visit this beach, and usually at a particular times, most often at sunset. The Om
Beach (depicted in the photo above) is the most famous, seeing as how people think its shape is very relevant to the nature of Gokarna. It therefore comes not only with a general selection of foreigners, but with a crowd of Indian tourists, especially on the weekends. Interestingly, Om Beach and Gokarna beach are the most crowded and/or polluted beaches, with both having boats available for rides, along with other water sports. It is interesting to see how the only two beaches with Indians to visit them, ensure various means of recreation.

Kudle beach lies somewhere in between the two in terms of crowd and the number of shacks, not being overly commercialized as such but has a fair number of people that visit it. Half Moon and Paradise Beach are the two smallest and most deserted beaches. While the some of the shacks present are run by Indians, nearly everyone else there is a foreigner. Indian tourists seem to otherwise keep away, and even the boat men are apprehensive and discrete about which Indians they take to these beaches, claiming a sort of nobility in wanting to protect the foreigners from the possibly invasive and crude tourists. What comes as a surprise is the amount of garbage that may be found; mountains of plastic bottles that will never make it to an actual garbage dump, lying behind shacks and make shift sewer pipes leading into the seemingly flawless sea. Clearly, everything is not as it seems, and the temporary culture (of these two beaches) that only lasts for the tourist season- does not allow for a more permanent, less ecologically damaging solution to waste disposal. With the influx of hippies in Gokarna, a new kind of housing facility is observable. There are shacks (In relation with Gokarna, shacks are little wooden structures found on the shores of the beach and are mostly run by migrants) seen on the shores of the Om and Kudle beach. This new development adds a new twist to the art and architecture of the town. The wooden structures are often temporary, and decorated with mythological posters. The walls too, are often covered with drawings and sketches of various Hindu Gods, with a certain amount of alteration. It is perhaps in the shacks, that a recreation and preservation of myths can be most clearly seen: most of these shacks are decorated by their foreign customers, who infuse elements from their own cultures and religions into the
Hindu mythological framework. So while keeping the mythologies alive, they also bring in further variations into the already existing diverse mythological spectrum.

Two interesting institutions that may be found are those of Swaswara (displayed in the photo above) and Ashokvana, both of which completely contradict the other and create intriguing spaces with varying dynamics. Ashokvana (displayed in the photo alongside) is a locally run business that is entirely environmentally friendly and sells organic products. While the selling of local, highly valued products has made it commercialized over time, it still differs in the degrees of commercialization as compared to Swaswara. In contrast, Swaswara is a five-star hotel, the only one of its kind in Gokarna. It’s different from your usual run-of-the-mill Radisson or Leela; in that it is built on ecologically friendly terms, allowing for rain water harvesting and the usage of environment friendly materials. It’s a serene environment, even in comparison to Gokarna definitely, but the most fascinating thing is that it caters solely to foreigners, even quoting prices in Euros. It’s rather expensive, clearly creating a line between social classes (not surprising, considering it’s a five-star), but it’s the single minded focus on foreigners one might question.

Within Gokarna, these distinctions are not yet visible within the entire community, but the implications of class barriers are already becoming clear. Spaces in Gokarna, therefore, operate culturally, and not just geographically. The spaces create divisions, integrations and dominations within different subcultures. These subcultures in turn create further divisions of space, thereby forming the other half of a dynamic cycle.
With the town’s diverse communities, there are distinct differences between the residential areas; these differences are observable in terms of economic status (the Brahmin houses as opposed to the local houses), occupational patterns (the Car Street as opposed to Swaswara resort), mythological representation (the temples as opposed to the shacks on the beaches). These architectural differences however, instead of retracting from the town, add to the diversity and blend in to provide the town with a coherent visual appearance. It is only when one investigates into the spatial occupancies and usages that one unearths the ruptures within the societal fabric of Gokarna.
3.8. Stairway to Heaven

Spirituality is a very interesting term in itself, a term that is commonly used but its essence is still very ambiguous in understanding. Everyone at some point in their lives seek spiritual peace and after going through turbulent and unsettling times, find themselves filled with questions which require answers. It is believed that spirituality is the universal answer to all the questions related to a variety of topics such as one’s existence, vices, meaning of life, among others. This highly generalized meaning has provided spirituality with a certain amount of ambiguity and freedom to interpret and experiment. So while certain spiritual groups have evolved and included the usage of psychoactive substances within the framework of attaining salvation, certain other groups stick to the traditional means of yoga and meditation. These differences in processes and beliefs lead to the formation of distinct groups and schools of spirituality, each with its own norms, rules and values. With these prevailing differences, we primarily tried to comprehend and document the different meanings of spirituality as understood by the indigenous as well as the migrant populations in Gokarna.

In terms of aesthetic appeal, there is more to Gokarna than the exquisite landscapes: there’s absolutely no doubt that every step of the way makes one want to stand still and completely savour the splendour of the beautiful beaches and the pristine waters. Yet the sanctity of the town presents an unmistakably holy ambiance which adds, rather than detracts, from the aesthetic beauty. It is the amalgamation of nature’s different elements that present themselves in such a breathtaking form, alongside the religious culture seamlessly floating in the townscape that captures one’s imagination. This simultaneous presence of the temple bells, along with the silence of the calm beaches, the co existence of different groups of people following different paths towards the same goal, provides the town with diversity in appearance, languages, values and cultures. The fact that this town integrates such different cultures within its space is perhaps, the main force behind the diverse national and international presence in the town.
The geographical landscape which includes the faultless beaches flowing alongside the range of hills offers tranquility whilst the sacredness in the temple town provides the comfort of the altogether familiar rituals. It is the combination of such elements that makes this town an ideal destination for the peace seeking, soul searching individuals who wish to introspect in solitude, formulate their philosophies on life, questioning fundamental issues of existence, getting away from the conditioning that the society enforces. It helps them break free from the depressing monotonous lives they lead elsewhere. Most tourists are here are on a journey of intrinsic self discovery which usually stems from a personal experience that makes them ponder over questions to which they seek answers.

The presence of the two ethnic groups- sadhu babas and the hippies (a person whose behaviour, dress, use of drugs etc implies a rejection of conventional values and advocates liberalism¹⁰) (as shown in the picture above) makes for yet another interesting phenomenon taking place in Gokarna. It is fascinating to see two completely different cultures with different sets of beliefs, rituals and customs in their quest for spiritual salvation. The pantheist ascetics religiously worship their deity – Šiva and believe that their lord manifests in everything; they engage in their rituals of havan, tapas and strongly believe in the concept of moksha. Their intense belief in Šiva has caused their entire lives and their daily activities to revolve around his worship; so much so that they believe that if there’s life, there’s Šiva, if there’s no life, there’s no Šiva. At the

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same time one is presented with the foreign tourists seeking spiritual guidance, whose beliefs and faith are deeply rooted in a metaphysical entity or a higher power, disbelief in religion; nonconformist tendencies by nature, they develop their own set of moral guidelines by which they choose to live. But what captivated us is the fact that both these ethnic groups believe in moksha and becoming one with the supreme consciousness, forging their lives from different perspectives to the same destination. There is also the presence of the Brahmin community that seeks spirituality through religions whose views are deeply rooted within the Vedas and think that the path to true realization is belief.

While these beliefs represent the internalized thought process, external aid is often sought too. Consumption of psychoactive substances inducing hallucinations is an inherently integral path of the spiritually inclined hippie community. Their intentional intake is substantiated by their rationale of entering altered states of consciousness to be able to introspect better; it helps them concentrate better and provides them with perspectives which cannot be perceived in the normal condition of the mind. It also enables them to break out of the years of social conditioning. It causes solitude conditioning which enables them to understand themselves in an enhanced manner, it is also facilitates a sedated sedentary lifestyle for which the hippies are essentially known.

While trying to understand the balance between the independent internal thought process and external aid in the form of substance usage, we did come across a few erudite intellectuals who enlightened us with their world views. An individual proclaiming himself to be ‘somebody from Gokarna’ presented his views in an appealing manner. For him spirituality was the connection with the inner self and seemed to be unperturbed with the external commercialization of various sanctimonious institutions. He believed God was the source of positive energy and quoted the Bhagavad Gita on issues such as duty, responsibility. His methodology seemed quite different from his counterparts as he did not believe in the intake of psychoactive substance and strongly believed in the value of the society, which according to him widens one’s learning and offers a plethora of perspectives. Another interesting case was that of a young female staying at Paradise beach; she was there on a spiritual journey and to get away from her life back home which she thought was filled with mundane activities. She had lost all motivation to continue in the similar fashion. She had come there to literally regain herself from the deplorable condition she was in back home and the climate and the surroundings
were proving to be therapeutic for her. She described herself as being hungry for love and affection and India as a country was providing her with a lot of warmth, helping her rejuvenate. After spending close to two months in Gokarna she felt more peaceful from within.

All these individuals provide an interesting perspective on human life, the journey towards meaning. The people we met at Gokarna provided us with a lot of food for thought; they were all individuals who had gone through some harsh circumstances, tragedies that made them halt and reconsider their lives, their own roles in this ephemeral world. Gokarna provided them with a sort of escape, an alternate to their mundane lives; however, it was not just a vacation spot for relaxation, nor was it a place to host psychedelic parties. The psychoactive substance intake was limited to a certain group of people, and did not disrupt the daily functioning of the town. Gokarna, thus, functioned as a place that aided and abetted their quest for meaning and liberation.

*People come to Gokarna seeking spiritual salvation*
3.9. IMBALANCES IN THE ECOLOGICAL BALANCE

Sights at first sight are always appealing. Reflective seawater, golden sand and gushes of clear air create an almost utopian atmosphere: especially after comparing Gokarna to some of the other beach towns around the country, one wonders if one just hit the jackpot. However, when we begin to delve deeper into the culture of the small temple town, many small things begin to catch our eye, which previously escaped our notice.

Brahmins hold themselves to be the supreme beings of the religious world, the spiritual ones and supposedly portray the epitome of hygiene and cleanliness. On the flipside, however, when one begins to look beyond the initial stereotypical impressions, one would get a deeper insight. It can be seen that cleanliness is defined by space: people begin to define space by what is ‘mine’ (apna) and what is ‘yours’ (paraya). The inside of most Brahmins houses were spick and spotless but the paths just outside their homes, which come under the public sphere, the segregation between apna and paraya becomes pronounced. It is seen that most of the shop owners as well on Car Street have done quite a tidy job when it comes to their respective spaces but when it comes to the footpath in close proximity, a line of waste and plastic bottles is observed on the street. Our hotel was in the midst of Car Street: every morning found us walking out to a garbage dump right outside the entrance of our hotel. The shop keepers were very particular about their routine; with a bucket of water they would clean the path right outside their shops, and then with a broom, would sweep all the garbage towards the next shop. The next shopkeeper endorsed the same routine and passed on the cumulative garbage on to the next shopkeeper. This process would continue until the garbage accumulated right in front of our hotel. The garbage would stay there until the garbage disposal van arrived in the late afternoon to collect the garbage. This routine however wasn’t regular, often times, we would notice that the garbage lay there, unattended to, people passing by with no concern whatsoever; if anything, the passersby would throw in more wrappers into the make shift garbage dump.

While this unconcerned behaviour and clear demarcation of ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ was observed within the commercial part of the town, a different end of the spectrum was visible in certain other places, located on the outskirts of the town. When we begin to compare two different methods of preservation: one native (Ashokvana) and two non-native (Swaswara and Namaste Yoga Farm) we began to notice stark differences in the approaches leading towards a similar goal. Ashokvana (as shown in the photo alongside) is an Ayurvedic farm devoted to saving plant species with medicinal value that are on the verge of extinction. On the other hand, we have Swaswara- a lavish five star resort, which attempts to incorporate meditation, luxury and harmony with nature under one roof. Swaswara has taken great strides towards making their resorts as ecologically friendly as possible: they use locally made thatched roofs made from dry coconut leaves and bamboo stems, the homes are made of laterite bricks which keep the rooms warm in the winters and cool in the summers and they also possess one of the most advanced rain-water harvesting systems within the country.

Similarly, adopting and promoting an eco-friendly lifestyle, Namaste Yoga Farm is a famous place situated on a hilltop overlooking the Arabian Sea. The yoga farm is a five-minute walk from the Kudle beach. It is constructed mainly from sustainable local materials such as mud, clay, volcanic stone, coconuts, bamboos, betel wood (The Betel is the leaf of a vine belonging to the Piperaceae family, which includes pepper and Kava. It is valued both as a mild stimulant and for its medicinal properties.), palm leaves, etc. It combines the traditional village elements with natural air-cooling, solar power and luxury. They also have eco-toilets (provides environmentally positive and cost effective waterless composting toilets with different sections for solid and liquid waste disposal).
However, here arises the difference between the native and the non-native: while the non-native looks lush and lavish it has its own set of drawbacks. Swaswara and Namaste Yoga Farm plant a lot of exotic plants within its resort, which are extremely harmful to the environment. Exotic species are not used to the local soil or the terrain other than the land in which they are naturally planted. They could also have toxic effect on the soil and cause soil erosion.

A secondary contrast is seen in terms of space and its significance. Gokarna beach is located in close proximity to the heart of the town. The beach is flooded with tourists and natives alike. The shacks are relatively clean however there are specific designated areas where waste and plastic have just been dumped. Along with this there is a sewage line that goes directly into the sea. On the contrary, paradise beach is located towards the outskirts of the town and this beach has hardly any native inhabitants and forms an epitome of ecological balance. However, on a slightly deeper glance one notices the presence of Acacia trees lining the way to Paradise beach. The Acacia trees originate from Australia. In Gokarna, it occurs as an exotic species, which has been planted in the form of a monoculture. Acacia is extremely easy to plant and is used extensively by the people of Gokarna for construction purposes.

However, there is deep rooted problem within this: when the Acacia leaves fall to the ground, the necessary microorganisms to decompose the leaves are absent and hence, they just lie there for years on end posing a problem almost as severe as plastic. This phenomenon of a
monoculture is termed as a green desert, which is extremely injurious towards the environment of a given location. Apart from the aforementioned problems, a monoculture is extremely harmful to environment as certain birds can only survive and build their nests in specific trees that are absent in these ‘green deserts’ and hence, a monoculture causes reduction in biodiversity.

Various attempts have been made by the local Gram Panchayat to change the course of this steady degradation. Projects have been designed towards sewage treatment projects and to prevent dumping of plastic on the beaches. However, these projects have been difficult to carry out due to a lack of funding. A movement to ban plastic bags is going to commence from the 1st of April this year post the Sivaratri festival.
4. CONCLUSION

4.1. COHERENCE IN CONTRADICTIONS

Hinduism is permeated by a reverence for life and an awareness that the great forces of nature - earth, sky, air, water and fire- as well as various orders of life, including plants, trees, forests and animals, are all bound together within the great rhythms of nature. The discernible biodiversity observed stems from the pantheistic belief of Hinduism. Hence, there is a noticeable parallel to be drawn between spirituality and ecology. In Gokarna, this parallel was especially obvious with regards to the measures employed in preserving the spiritual aspect and the ecology of the town.

Gokarna employs dual methods of conserving nature and traditions- native and non-native. By native conservation, we refer to the efforts of the local people and these efforts are most visible in Ashokvana, the fields and plantations on the outskirts; and the areas surrounding the Mahabaleshwara temple. The owners of Ashokvana strive to conserve the indigenous plant species that have certain medicinal values and they propagate the use of these plants by running a clinic for nominal fees. One of the primary occupations in Gokarna is the cultivation of coconut groves. Coconuts are an indigenous produce of Gokarna as are the other agrarian products (sugarcane, rice and other food grains, etc.) cultivated in the outskirts. Much like the agriculturists, the Brahmins, who occupy the space around the Mahabaleshwara temple (mainly Car Street and its artillery streets), constantly endeavour to maintain the traditions and original roots of Hindu spirituality.

Non-native conservation is the result of not only the foreign tourists but also the state Forest Department. The government run department is responsible for extensively planting Australian acacia trees in the areas that form the outskirts of the town and thereby preserving the species and creating a monoculture. The influx of foreign tourists has led to an increased fervour in discovering and preserving the Indian idea of spirituality. There are increasing numbers of foreign nationals who come to Gokarna to study yoga and pursue other avenues of spirituality.
While the influence of a pantheistic religion is evident, the most overpowering religious presence in Gokarna is that of the Atmalinga. Lord Śiva is one of the most fascinating and multi-dimensional gods of Hinduism. He is the confluence of numerous contradictions and these contradictions are extremely prominent within the portals of Gokarna. The three most important facets of Śiva are those of the Creator, the Preserver and the Destroyer. In this chapter, we will elaborate on how different spaces don the mantle of these different roles. However, much like the Lord himself there is often an overlap of the three roles within a single space.

### 4.2 The Creator

The forces of globalization, as seen in the analysis, acted as catalysts for various factors that were previously dormant. Gokarna was not a vacuum - spatially or culturally, before globalization. Gokarna however, was dominated by a specific group of people, which were present in the various aspects of society such as administration, law enforcement, economics and daily ritualistic tendencies. The Brahmins, by the virtue of the hegemonic caste system employed their power and in turn, dominated over Gokarna – culturally and spatially. Gokarna was primarily a temple town, a deeply religious one at that. Without the presence of any foreign communities, the entire town was primarily a Hindu town, revolving around specific festivals, rituals and Śiva worship.
The Brahmins were the creator of these deeply religious tendencies; they preserved these religious inclinations and their power through the perpetration of myths, by building the image of Gokarna along the lines of various mythological stories. In order to support the creation and preservation of their power, the Brahmins further had to destroy any potential opposition; they did so by exploiting the local indigenous population under the pretext of religion. By charging exorbitant rates for performing pujas while simultaneously sugar coating these extortions through religion, they maintained their dominance. The Mahabaleshwara temple, and the Brahmin quarters around it, thus formed the spine of Gokarna; all the important decisions were taken in this space. The relegation of labour, practices and responsibilities of each individual resident was also decided in this space. Thus, before globalization, Gokarna was created, preserved and destroyed by the Brahmins at the Mahabaleshwara temple.

However, this omnipresence of the Brahmins in all the three roles of Śiva was challenged post globalization. With the forces of globalization seeping into every facet of Gokarna, new conditions and processes have emerged. These processes have created conflicts, generated some form of consensus and led to an imperfect amalgamation of distinct communities within one overarching space of Gokarna. Within this space, the Mahabaleshwara temple continues to retain its significance as the creator of Gokarna. Admittedly, Gokarna has numerous identities, but it continues to retain its predominant identity as the ‘Kashi of the South’. In this aspect the Brahmins, playing the role of the priests (and subsequently the guardians of the temple) continue to remain an indispensible factor in ensuring the continuation of this tradition. Gokarna was created on account of the atmalinga; it continues to retain that creationist aspect till today.

4.3. The Preserver

“Following the creation concept that creation processes differed from preservation processes, it is suggested that God endowed each created kind, at the time of its creation, with potential for vast variety.”-Walter Lang

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Through our short stint in Gokarna we witnessed a tremendous variety of predominant cultures. What is interesting to note is the fact that while each of these cultures are extremely dominant in their own way they are mutually inclusive as well. Certain geographic locations around the town have imbibed the role of the preserver due to certain traits from these cultures having their own unique roles to play in the crux of preservation. Ashokvana exemplifies their attempt to save the local species of plants from going extinct. The Car Street (displayed in the photo alongside) as well has been found to be a dominating condition for the preservation of tradition within the town. During the festival of Śivarathri this is the main route the devotees take as they pull the huge chariots (raths) carrying many pictures of deities and of the Lord Śiva as well.

This is one ritual that has been found to be constant despite the many years, amidst the changes brought about in and around the town by globalization. Despite the heavy impacts of globalization which is noticeable throughout the town, the Car Street is a concrete example of the tradition remaining intact. The presence of Koti Teertha around the corner of the Car Street further enables the perpetuation of myths, of the sacredness and sanctity of the temples, especially the Atmalinga. While Mahabaleshwara temple retains the mantle creator the other temples serve as the preserver in that it helps the town retain its image as a temple town. It enhances the emphasis of Gokarna as a pilgrim center due to the myths it harbors and preserves.
4.4. **THE DESTROYER**

One of Śiva’s most prominent, renowned roles in Hinduism is that of the destroyer, the one who would bring the universe to a state of complete annihilation. But even more relevant is the fact that in Hinduism, there is no absolute ‘end of the world’, no ‘apocalypse’, no one point after which the universe would cease to exist. Therefore the whole purpose of Śiva’s dance of destruction, of his ‘ending of the world’, is so the entire cosmos may be recreated; so that every existence that was obliterated may be reborn in new light. It seems that Gokarna may now be spinning on the axis of destruction, brought to this state by the obscene swell of globalization and consequentially, the influx of new cultures. The increasingly depleted ecological state of the beaches is a rather large warning sign. As is the reinterpretation of myth, the all-pervading ganja and alcohol culture prevalent in the beaches, that one produces bribes to protect, and fake permits to allow. There are cracks that are now beginning to show clearly in the legal system, a painful thing to accept in a place that is holy, and wishes to remain so. However, on slight positive note, the assimilation of new cultures post globalization has led to a decline in the predominance of the caste system. The transfer of the administrative power of the Mahabaleshwara temple to the Ramachandrapura Math has further enabled to keep the exploitative forces at check. These are marginal improvements, and one would hope that these improvements acquire more force and presence within Gokarna. However, at present it would appear
that the very nature of Śiva that allowed for the ‘creation’ of such a Gokarna is also the reason for its ‘destruction’; it all seems to resemble the fragility of a card castle that is now falling in on itself.

The invariable contradiction in subcultures has lead to conflicts, certainly. However, these contrasts also operate at the same time and therefore have begun to overlap. In our research, we’ve sought to show that there are ‘binary opposites’ present in Gokarna, but also that nothing exists in isolation. Even the numerous contrasts within the amalgamation that is Gokarna emerge from one particular source; aspiration. It is the constant craving for power and the irrepressible want to establish ones culture as the most dominant. Thus, in Gokarna, there are contradictions, various forces pulling in different (not necessarily opposite) directions. However, these contradictions do not result in a full scale war, nor do they withhold the town from functioning normally. Rather, they add to the rubric of the town, bring in new elements. Gokarna, for now, seems to have assimilated these forces together within its larger framework, very much like Lord Śiva himself. By embodying the liberal spirit of Śiva, Gokarna presents to its visitors, a coherence within its contradictions, a beautiful diversity portraying an intricately woven story of human civilization.
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