

From Chanderi to Chanderiyaan- 'Living Heritage' Flourishing

The 2nd World Living Heritage Festival-2014 was held in Udaipur from 13th March to 16th March 2014. Maharana of Mewar Charitable Foundation, Udaipur in association with UNESCO New Delhi, organized the event. The conference discussed themes and priorities of living heritage across India.

Global agencies, government and non-government bodies, educational institutions, foundations, the private sector and the media participated in the conference. The main focus of the conference was to promote culture, tradition and heritage of the country. Speakers talked about the way Government and other administrative bodies can participate in enhancing culture and heritage related issues in the country and give it an international stature.

Digital Empowerment Foundation participated in the conference to give an insight about one of DEF initiatives in Chanderi. With the aim to help revive the marginalized communities of weavers in Chanderi, in 2009, Digital Empowerment Foundation launched Chanderiyaan project. It started as an integral cluster based project with approach to have overall development using digital technologies. This initiative also introduced the local weavers to using ICT tools, upgrading the skills century. It also worked towards giving a web identity and presence to the rich heritage, culture and long forgotten folklores of this small town.

This project set an example of how digital intervention and digital literacy can be used to change lives, focus on assets and also lay emphasis on the need to be 'virtually' heard and seen. Today Chanderi boasts itself to have its own Digital Design Center, an entire weaving area that is Wi-Fi enabled, digitization of 10,000 designs from the past to the present, including conversion of digital photos of stone carvings and jalis (net) into designs on clothes, entire weavers family digitally surveyed, mapped and monitored. Apart from these, 13 local schools have also been Wi-Fi enabled along with computer labs, local

entrepreneurs have opened cyber cafes and Community Information Resource Center and local health centers have been connected to district hospitals with tele-health programs.

The tourism has picked up immensely since Chanderi got its own tourism website. The digital library that documented over 375 monuments, 500 unique stone carvings, over 200 unique trees and plants which have medicinal and other health benefits, surely draws tourists from all over, who now want to know more about this small town and experience its rich 'living heritage'.

The local weavers, who at one point did not know how to read or write or even design their own work, today have been trained in vocational ICT skills, trained in Basic English language, and have also been introduced to the Chanderi in Basic English language programs. Apart from this, they have also been trained into creating designs using CAD/CAM softwares. They have been provided with computerized Jacquard Card punching services. They have also been trained in apparel design; block-printing using computerized design, and computerized integrated embroidery design.

Through its project Chanderiyaan DEF has taken the invisible community of weavers forward. It has also proven to be a strong method of revenue generation and set an example of how digital inclusion can help revive not just a community but also an entire municipal town.

