Heritage Vandalism: Psychological and Sociological Reasons

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Abstract:- Vandalism is the intentional destruction of public or private property, possessing a significant threat to heritage monuments. In Kerala, historical sites frequently suffer from acts such as scribbling, defacement and unscientific restoration, diminishing their aesthetic, historic and cultural significance. Beyond the physical damage, vandalism impacts cultural identity, community pride, and the socio-economic landscape by eroding the sense of this shared heritage. This paper explores the psychological and sociological reasons behind vandalism in built heritage, on the basis of survey conducted on the built heritage sites of Kerala. It also presents potential remedies, focusing on education, legislation, and community involvement to limit this destructive behaviour.

Keywords:- Vandalism, Heritage Conservation, Built Heritage, Kerala, Psychology, Sociological Impact, Cultural Identity.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "vandalism" was coined in 1794 by Henri Grégoire, to describe the destruction of artwork following the French Revolution (Merrills, 2009). Vandalism remains a persistent problem in many parts of India including Kerala. Urban areas, particularly cities with high population densities and popular tourist destinations are often more susceptible to vandalism due to increased traffic and more visibility to structures. Investigation on the grounds and patterns of vandalism provides insights into the motivation and intentions of the vandals, the vulnerability and weakness in the security and management systems.

The survey and study conducted during 2023 in the built heritage monuments across Kerala, bring out a general conclusion that the intentional vandalism caused by the individuals are the result of their psychological misbehaviour and the mob vandalism can be attributed to the mob psychology or sociological reasons. The individual misbehaviour can be controlled by effective government policies and proper value education system. The present study has given some understanding on the behavioral psychology and social issues behind it and to an extent put forth possible remedies and suggestions to prevent vandalism.

II. PSYCHOLOGY BEHIND VANDALISM

The psychology behind vandalism is a complex subject that can vary from individual to individual. According to psychologists, we make marks on walls for the same reason we attempt to make our mark on society. We worry that, once we die, the only piece left to show for our existence will be in the objects we have touched, essays ascribed to our names, papers proving ownership (Becker, E. 1973). Instead of aiming to have our names attributed to important accomplishments, we ought to work toward making our mark on other people. This is the reason why people engrave their names on the available places.

While it is difficult to generalize, the survey and study point towards the fact that there are some common psychological factors causing individuals to engage in acts of vandalism, which is seen in most of the cases of vandalism, as well as in Kerala too:

- Thrill-seeking: Some individuals engage in vandalism to experience a sense of excitement or thrill. The act of vandalizing can provide a temporary rush of adrenaline high, satisfying their need for excitement or novelty.
- Peer Influence: Vandalism can sometimes be influenced by influence of friends too. When in a group, individuals tend to behave in a mob pleasing way or as an act of fun to gain their support. Thia can also be considered as a social aspect of vandalism (Goldstein, 1996).
- Social Acceptance: The concept of mob psychology can be recognised here. Individuals may engage in destructive behaviour to conform to group norms, gain acceptance, or prove their loyalty to a particular group. Mostly religious fanatics and terrorism contribute to this type of behaviour. Frequent acts of vandalism can and normalize destructive behaviour. When vandalism becomes common, it may encourage people to copy it and further contribute to the deterioration of historical monuments (Goldstein, 1996).
- Aggression: Vandalism can be an considered as method for unexpressed frustration, anger or aggression. Individuals may feel powerless or marginalized, and engaging in acts of vandalism allows them to show control or express their dissatisfaction with their surroundings or society. This type is rarely seen in types of vandalism in Kerala (Namba, et. al. 1993).

- Attention-seeking: Some individuals may engage in vandalism as a way to gain attention or recognition. Destructive acts can draw attention to themselves or their grievances, providing a temporary sense of importance or notoriety.
- Antisocial Behaviour: Certain psychological disorders can be associated with an increased possibility of engaging in vandalism. Individuals with these disorders may have difficulty regulating their emotions, controlling impulses, or respecting social norms (Goldstein, 1996).
- Loss of Sense of Belonging: Vandalism can occur when individual loss sense of community and fail to consider the consequences of their actions on others or the community. They may not fully understand the impact of their vandalism on the property owner, public spaces, or the broader community (Namba, et. al. 1993).

It's important to note that not everyone who engages in vandalism exhibits the same underlying psychological factors. Each case is unique, and multiple factors can affect to influence an individual's or even the mob's decision to vandalize.

III. SOCIOLOGY BEHIND VANDALISM

The sociology behind vandalism discovers the broader social factors that contribute to the occurrence and understanding of vandalism as a social phenomenon. Following are some key sociological perspectives that shed light on vandalism:

➢ *Social Disorganization:*
Vandalism often occurs in areas characterized by social disorganization, where communities face poverty, unemployment, high crime rates, and a lack of social cohesion. When social bonds weaken and community institutions are ineffective, individuals may engage in vandalism as a response to their perceived neglect or frustration (Higgins, 1993).

➢ *Symbolic Interactionism:*
Vandalism can be understood through the lens of symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes the meanings and interpretations individuals assign to their actions and the symbols involved. Individuals engaging in vandalism may use it as a means of communicating their dissatisfaction, asserting power, or challenging social norms. Vandalized spaces and objects can also serve as symbols of resistance or protest (Higgins, 1993).

➢ *Subcultural Influences:*
Subcultures, such as graffiti or street art communities, may have their own norms, values, and aesthetics surrounding vandalism. These subcultures can provide a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose for individuals who engage in acts of vandalism. Subcultural influences can shape attitudes towards authority, ownership, and public space, encouraging or justifying certain acts of vandalism within these subcultures (Monto, 2003).

➢ *Alienation and Anomie:*
Alienation and anomie (Monto et. al, 2013), as discussed by sociologist Emile Durkheim, refer to feelings of disconnectedness, normlessness, and lack of purpose in society. When individuals experience a sense of alienation or feel disconnected from societal values and norms, they may engage in vandalism as a means of expressing their discontent or searching for a sense of meaning and belonging (Monto, 2003).

➢ *Power Dynamics and Inequality:*
Vandalism can also be seen as a response to perceived power imbalances or social inequalities. When individuals feel marginalized, excluded, or oppressed within society, acts of vandalism may be a way to challenge authority, reclaim public spaces, or express resistance against those in power.

➢ *Moral Panics and Deviance Amplification:*
Vandalism can trigger moral panics within society, wherein certain acts or behaviours are exaggerated, stigmatized, and responded to with increased social control. Media coverage and public reactions to instances of vandalism can sometimes amplify deviant behaviour, leading to a cycle of further acts of vandalism as a form of rebellion or defiance (Higgins, 1993).

➢ *Changing Societal Values and Preferences:*
Societal values and preferences evolve over time, and there may be a shift away from the appreciation of traditional architecture and historic buildings. As a result, built heritage may be seen as outdated or irrelevant, leading to its destruction or neglect (Monto, 2003).

Understanding the sociology behind vandalism is crucial for implementing effective strategies to prevent and address this issue. It involves addressing social disorganization, promoting community cohesion, providing alternative outlets for creative expression, tackling social inequalities, and creating inclusive and engaging environments that discourage destructive behaviour (Chalfant, H., 1992). Additionally, considering the symbolic meanings and social contexts associated with acts of vandalism can help inform approaches that seek to transform negative behaviour into positive contributions to society.
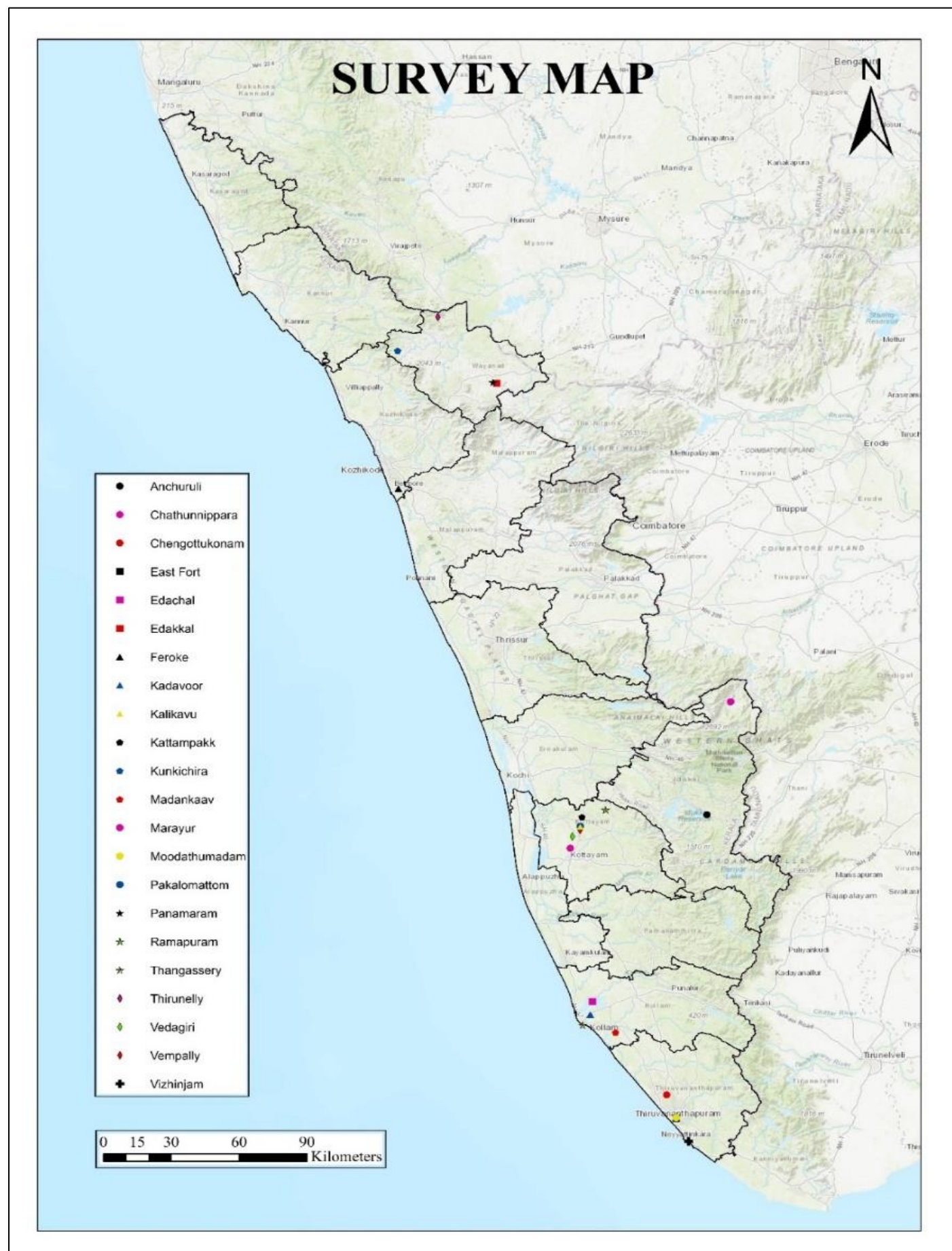
Fig 1 Geographical Location of the Archaeological Sites Surveyed for the Study (2023)

IV. WAYS TO PREVENT VANDALISM

Preventing vandalism requires a multifaced approach, including education, community engagement, and addressing underlying psychological factors. By providing alternative openings for attention-seeking or aggression, improving communities' unity and development a sense of pride in public spaces, it is possible to reduce occurrences of vandalism and create a more respectful environment.

The need of the hour, therefore, is the public awareness to educate people and to instil in them a sense of love and pride to their tangible and intangible antiquarian wealth and to make them understand the importance of legislations in preserving and promoting heritage for posterity (Patil, 2019). The cultural heritage is incredibly diverse, and the process of promoting cultural awareness requires a complicated method that includes various methods. The electronic and print media are the most effective means to reach common people and younger generation besides domestic and foreign tourists (Patil, 2019).

V. REVIEWS AND SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions to lessen the impact of vandalism and some suggestions to hinder the depletion of the built heritage monuments in the future.

- Raising awareness, promoting responsible tourism, and implementing strong enforcement measures can help reduce the negative impacts of unregulated tourism on historical monuments, ensuring their preservation for future generations (Gramann et al., 1992).
- Vandalism resulting from limited funding and weak legislation can be addressed by increasing financial support, strengthening laws, raising public awareness, and fostering cooperation with local, governmental, and international organizations when needed. Increased surveillance, such as the installation of CCTV cameras can act as a preventive factor to vandalism. Public spaces that are well-lit and which are under proper surveillance are less likely to be targeted.
- Documentation of the historical monuments can prevent the vandalism caused on them. If the monuments are documented accordingly, they will be protected accordingly. Every treasure founded out are taken out under the Indian Treasure Trove Act, 1878. A sum equal to the material value together with one-fifth additional value is paid to persons entitled i.e., the finder or finder and owner, as the case may be. The material or face value is taken into consideration rather than the antiquarian value of the treasure (Patil, 2019). The treasures, therefore whenever acquired, their antiquarian importance and value may be considered as the criteria to pay the monetary benefits to the persons entitled instead of material value as provided in the Section 20 of AAT, Act 1972 and Section 28 of AMASR Act, 1958 (Patil, 2019). It encourages people to come forward and report the unveiled sites to the department of Archaeology or to the respective authorities, when found.

- Appropriate consequences for those caught vandalizing can also discourage future acts. There are laws in India for stopping vandalism, but are not effectively enforced. The laws should be effectively carried out by the authorities so that we could make the vandalism to a possible end. Implementing strict penalties for the destruction of heritage monuments is essential, with special courts and designated officers assigned to expedite these cases efficiently. Appointing new officers to oversee documented sites, as well as documenting newly discovered sites, would not only help deter vandalism but also create employment opportunities for educated, unemployed individuals (Monto, 2003).
- Negligence by authorities in ensuring proper illumination can lead to increased instances of graffiti, damage to property, and other forms of vandalism. Effective collaboration among local authorities, tourism agencies, heritage organizations, and the community is crucial for establishing sustainable tourism practices that prioritize the preservation of historical monuments. Such partnerships can reduce the impact of vandalism on built heritage sites and discourage future acts of vandalism.

Finally, it is necessary for both government and society to recognize the importance of heritage sites, actively share responsibility for their protection, and take preventive measures to minimize risks. By doing so, we can safeguard these invaluable sites for future generations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study has given understanding on the behavioral psychology and social issues behind it and to an extent put forth possible remedies and suggestions to prevent vandalism in Kerala. The survey and study conducted bring out a general conclusion that the intentional vandalism caused by the individuals are the result of their psychological misbehaviour and the mob vandalism can be attributed to the mob psychology or sociological reasons. The individual misbehaviour can be controlled by effective government policies and proper value education system.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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