

Exploring Thane: A Heritage Tourist Destination

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Abstract:- Thane city is developing rapidly into an industrial, commercial, and cosmopolitan city. Today the city has been growing and expanding constantly by catering the needs of residential, administrative, cultural, commercial, educational and recreational activities. But in the course of development it is losing its historical importance. In spite of old heritage city and rich in natural beauty, tourism industry is yet to develop in Thane. By giving informative insight into the historical importance of Thane and its heritage sites, this paper is a sincere effort to present Thane as a popular heritage tourist destination. The research paper will explore the potentiality of heritage tourism in this city. A survey will be conducted to know the awareness among local people towards heritage sites and historical importance of Thane.

Keywords:- Thane, Heritage, Tourism, History, Shilahara, Portuguese.

I. INTRODUCTION

Thane is the centre of numerous cultural, historical and natural heritages. The city is characterized by cultural and religious diversity. This well-known port city of past deserves to be acclaimed as heritage city. Existence of different types of religious, civil and administrative structures is the witness of arrival and dominance of different communities on this land. Being a port city and connected to Arabian Sea, it drew many trading communities from the country, and abroad. Geographical location and economic prosperity allured many invaders to plunder and rule this land. The popularity of the city was at the apex during the rule of Shilaharas. It was their capital and known as Sristhanaka. Thane was also captured and ruled by Muslim rulers, Portuguese, Marathas and British respectively. The changing ruling powers influenced the architectural structures of the city. Trade connections with Arabians and other foreign countries increased the importance of Thane in the past. Arrival of Parsi and Jews trading communities added their cultural influence to this city. Thane is also blessed with beautiful natural surroundings. The land is bounded by the Thane creek, Sahyadri range and Ulhās River. Abundant greeneries enhance the beauty of the city. The naturally beautiful and historically important city has great the potentiality to develop tourism sector.

II. GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

Thane city is located in the north-east of Mumbai and at an elevation of seven meters above sea level. From one side it is surrounded by the Thane Creek which connects the Ulhash River and falls down into the Arabian Sea. The area covered by Thane city is 147 km¹ which consisted of Kopri in the south, Wagle estate Lokmanya nagar, Naupada, Panch-Pakhadi to the west, Kalwa to the east and Manpada, Brahmand, Kolshet, Kasar-Wadavli, Owala, Gaimukh, Kapurbawdi to the north.

III. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The recorded history of Thane city reveals that it has been called by various names from ancient times. The copper plate of 997 AD mentions that this city was called as Shree-Sthanak.² In 1344, Ibn Batuta visited the city and called it as Kugin Tana.³ Deuarte Barbosa, a noted Portuguese traveler, called it by the name Tana Mayambu. Portuguese gave it the name Cacabe de Tana. British named it 'Thana'.

After Mauryan Empire, around 185 BC, Thane came under the rule of Satavahana which continued till 230 AD. After the end of Satvahana's rule, Abhiras ruled over Thana from 167 AD to 417AD. The Kalachuri's of central India ruled for 50 years during fifth century AD. In sixth and early part of seventh century, Thana was ruled by Konkan Maurya. The prosperity of the city attracted different plunderers. In 636 AD Thane was plundered by Usman bin Asi Sakifi the Governor of Bahrain and Oman.⁴

The Shilahara ruled Thana from 810 AD to 1260 AD. Due to religiously tolerant Shilahara rulers many people of different religions and communities settled down in Thane. This gave a cosmopolitan nature to the city. Because of presence of many Buddhist caves in the outskirt area such as Bhaja caves, Bedse cave, Karla cave, Kanheri caves and Nashik caves many Buddhist monks frequently visited to this city.

The Explorer Marco polo who visited Thane in 1290, stated Thane as one of the best cities in the world. Ab-ul-Fida (1273-1331) mentioned Thane as the best province and popular for the production of a kind of cloth Tanasi and Bamboo sugarcane.⁵ Thane coast took a leading part in foreign trade and commerce of western coast. It remained under the domination of Muslim rulers of Gujarat from 1320 to 1534. After Muslim rule Thane was captured by Portuguese. The Portuguese ruled the land for over 200 years till 1739. Under Portuguese, Thane gained popularity

as an important trading Centre. During Portuguese period Thana coast was popular for Ship building.

Marathas came into contact with Thane in the first half of 17th century. They captured forts of Pasik, Arnala and Ghodbunder. The Thana fort was under the command of Chimaji Appa. To recapture Thane from Marathas, Portuguese send Pedro de Mello in 1738. The battle took place between Maratha army and Portuguese. Portuguese were defeated and Pedro De Mello was killed. From 1774 to till India's independence in 1947, Thane remained under British. During British rule Thane played a role as an administrative centre. The English contributed a lot to revenue, judiciary and administration of Thane.

➤ *Heritage Sites of the City:* -

This historic city has abundant potentialities to develop heritage tourism. Many old structures are existed as reminiscence of past. The Present study took effort to collect detailed information of few old heritages of Thane and has given an insight into their historical significance.

Kopineshwer temple is located at station road, Thane. This temple was constructed in 1760 by Ramji Bivalkar, Sur Subedar of Thane during Peshwa period.⁶ It is said that Shilaharas constructed the temple of Uttreshwer in Uthalsher. After capturing Thane, Portuguese destructed the temple and threw out the remains in Masunda Lake. According to one historical reference in order to build a church, Antonio do Porto pulled down 12 pagodas which were around a big lake known as Antony Lake.⁷ The lake was later renamed as Masunda Lake. During Peshwa period the lake was cleared of silt, many mutilated and well carved images along with a big Shiva-linga were found. The Shiva-linga was installed by Marathas in newly built temple.

Shri Dutta Temple is located at Chendani, near CIDCO, Thane. The temple was constructed in 1880 AD. It was renovated in 1921 and in 1985 respectively. In 1866 Ananda Bharti a devotee of Akkal kot Swami installed Swami's Padukas in the temple. Vitthal Sayna Dutta mandir is dedicated to Lord Datta Raya which is popularly known as the Vitthal Sayna Dutta temple. The temple is named after the person who undertook construction work of the temple. The deity was consecrated on 8th September 1912.⁸ Laxmi Narayan Mandir is situated at Gokhale road Thane. It is a private temple constructed in 1905.⁹ Ghantali Devi Mandir is situated at Ghantali, Thane. Originally it was a Shiva temple. The whole area was covered with green shrubs. It is said that this temple was established almost 120-150 years ago in this isolated place. It is said that Ghantali devi's idol was found near shrubs.¹⁰ This temple became famous as Ghantai temple because sound of bell of temple attracted many people to assemble here at the time of puja. No references has been found regarding the construction of the temple. It is said that ancestor of Rao Sahib Keshav Rao Bhashkarji Kothare built this temple. Sripad Anil Bhargav Joshi and others have been

maintaining this temple since 1947. It was renovated in 1972 by Shri Mai Ghokhale.¹¹

Killa Maruti Temple is near Central Jail. Maratha under the leadership of Chimaji Appa captured Thane fort in 1737. At that time this temple was inside the jail. Solider of this fort used to worship in this temple .It is said that Chimaji Appa shifted this temple outside the fort.¹² Hanuman temple is situated at Ghokhale road, Naupada. This temple was established in 1848.¹³

Saint John Baptist Church is located in the north side of Masunda Lake. This is the oldest church of Thane. It is constructed during 17th and 18th century. This church was formerly known as Anthony Church. The church was originally dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua by Franciscan friar about 1540. References are found that in 1321 four Franciscan friars came to Thane to spread Christianity. It is said this was the place where the four Franciscan friars were murdered in 1324 by Muslim Governor of Thane. It is also said that in order to build the church, Antonio do Porto pulled down 12 pagodas which were around the big lake which was known as Anthony lake.¹⁴ It was no doubt that lake was Masunda Lake which was then known as Anthony Lake. 12 temples which were devoted to lord Shiva were destructed by Portuguese. This church was constructed by using the stones of the Hindu temple. In 1881 when the part of the lake was cleared of silt, many mutilated and well carved images were found.¹⁵ They had probably been thrown into the lake by the Portuguese. The building is originally dedicated to Saint Anthony of Padua. Saint Anthony's church was made the parish church and dedicated to Saint John the Baptist. The building originally belonged to a church of Saint John the Baptist. There is one of the largest Portuguese bells in India. The church bears the date 1609 at one side of the door way of the south end. The church has the date 1663 and at the entrance 1725.¹⁶

Saint James Church is a British architectural structure, located near jail reservoir and Thane head post office. It was constructed in 1825 after the name of St. James, a disciple of Jesus Christ at the cost of Rs 48,039 (£4804).¹⁷ It was consecrated by Bishop Heber who was invited from Calcutta. There were British soldiers and officers in charge of the Jail inside Thane Fort. They had an additional duty to safeguard the mercantile ships from sea pirates. It was for this small group of British Christian soldiers and their families, the need of protestant church arose. The initiative was finally taken up in 1825 by the wife of the Governor of Bombay, Mount Elphinstone. With the help of Captain Tete an architect in the Army, this church was constructed. Bishop Heber was invited from Calcutta to consecrate the church. The church was constructed in rich Gothic architecture. The church had tall pillars in Gothic style. To the west side of the church, there is a big cemetery for the members of the church. There are some old tombs inside it such as tomb of John Vhon dated 1780, tomb of James Driffeld dated 1784 and tomb of Stephen Babinton dated 1822.¹⁸

From independence to till date Church is maintained by Bombay Diocesan Trust association. The trust association has incurred expenditure of Rs.3, 22,000/ in the renovation of the church.

Jama Mosque is the oldest mosque of Thane city. It is located at Mahagiri. It is a large building of an unknown date. It was repaired during seventies by Widow Jusab Menun of a cost of 10,000. It formerly enjoyed an allowance of Rs.20.¹⁹

A Synagogue was constructed by Jews at Thane in 1879 which is popular as “Shaar Hashamaim” Gate of Heaven. The Synagogue was renovated and beautified in 1999. A lot of change is made in the old structure but inner prayer hall still possesses its past look. Shaar Hashamaim is an important centre of Jewish activities. Today 40 percent Jewish population in India are residing in and around the city of Thane.

Parsi Agyari, the Fire temple of Parsi was constructed in 1780 by Cawsji Sorabji Rustomji Patel. After Muslim invasion Parsi migrated from Gujarat to Thane. In 17th century the population of Parsi increased in Thane. Three decades ago there were only handful Zoroastrian families in old Thane. The burden of keeping alive the holy fire along with the regular ceremonies were managed by one Modeb Saheb. Later it was managed by community members. This structure remained under dilapidated condition for several years. Recently renovation work has been done to make it more spacious and elegant.

There are two Jain temples in Thane. These temples are located at Tembhi naka. One is very old and other is new, facing each other with a road in between. The new temple took about twenty years to complete. The construction started before First World War. At the entrance of the temple there are statues of two majestic elephants. It has an inner chamber with a dome. There is a considerable place in the inner chamber. The entire space on the walls enclosing the inner chamber depicts in pictorial forms the various episodes in the life of Jain Tirthankar. Use of different colours in sculptures gives a magnificent appearance to the temple. Hira Kot or Diamond Fort is located at the centre of the town. It is located at station road near Marathi Granthashala. It was formerly used as the town jail.²⁰ In 1861 British Government abolished it as a town jail. All prisoners were removed to fort jail. This building was offered to Mauritius government as an emigration depot.²¹ However, the offer was not accepted. Since 1862 it has been used as Mamlatdar's office and collector's record room.

Thane Fort: In 1719 the Marathas established themselves in Kalyan and extended their activities into the Portuguese territories. Realizing threat from Marathas, the Portuguese constructed Thane fort in 1730. In 1737 Maratha army attacked Thana fort and occupied it. The fort was renamed as Fateh Buruj or the tower of victory. It was unfinished till the attack of Marathas later it was completed by them. When it was captured by British in 1774, it was

armed with more than a hundred cannons. It was surrounded by stone built wall from 16 to 21 feet high. It had a regular bastion and towers which enclose an area of 13/12 acres (5.463) hectares. To the west and south west of the jail, there is an esplanade, which in 1776, was formed by order of the directors by clearing away the houses. On the southern end of the esplanade, there were the police lines. Between the lines and the Liberi landing place, there were large houses used by Portuguese. Some inscribed Portuguese gravestones were found while clearing away one of the fort buildings. In 1857 fort was converted into Jail. The building has ample room to accommodate thousand prisoners.

There was great historical significance of Thane Railway station. It was constructed in 1853. The first passenger train in India started on 16 April 1853 which connected Bombay to Thane.

Ghodbunder Fort is located in Ghodbunder village, Thane. From ancient time to British period this fort played an important role in horse trade. Horses were brought by sea route and unloaded at this fort. References are found that horses from Persia and Arabia were imported and kept in this fort for supply. Horses were supplied to Bahmani Kingdom and Delhi Sultanate. It was captured by British in 1774.²² This valuable heritage is at present lying in pitiable condition.

Bivalkar's Wada was constructed in 1754. Ramji Bivalkar was appointed as Sur subedhar of Thane during Peshwa period. His residence was popular as Bivalkar's wada. It was a grand residential bungalow. It consisted of Diwan khana, Khalbat khana, Chafekan, room to keep books, rooms to keep arms and weapons, store house, kitchen etc. When British captured Thane and converted it into court. From British period to present time it has been used as Thane court. The whole structure got renovated by Maharashtra Government.²³

Buvaji Naik's Wada is at present known as Collector's office. This is situated at court naka, Thane. This old architectural structure is one of the example of Maratha style.

Some other heritages of Thane are Kalwa Bridge constructed in 1863, B.H School in 1821, M.H. high school in 1890, Collector's office in 1824-27, Thane civil hospital building in 1835-36, Railway Station Bridge in 1855 etc. All these heritage structures revive the memory of Thane in past.

Lack of Awareness of local people about the history and heritage sites of Thane city In spite of so many heritage sites, Thane has not yet been developed as a tourist spot.

A survey conducted over 100 samples of residents to know their knowledge about history of Thane and heritage sites.

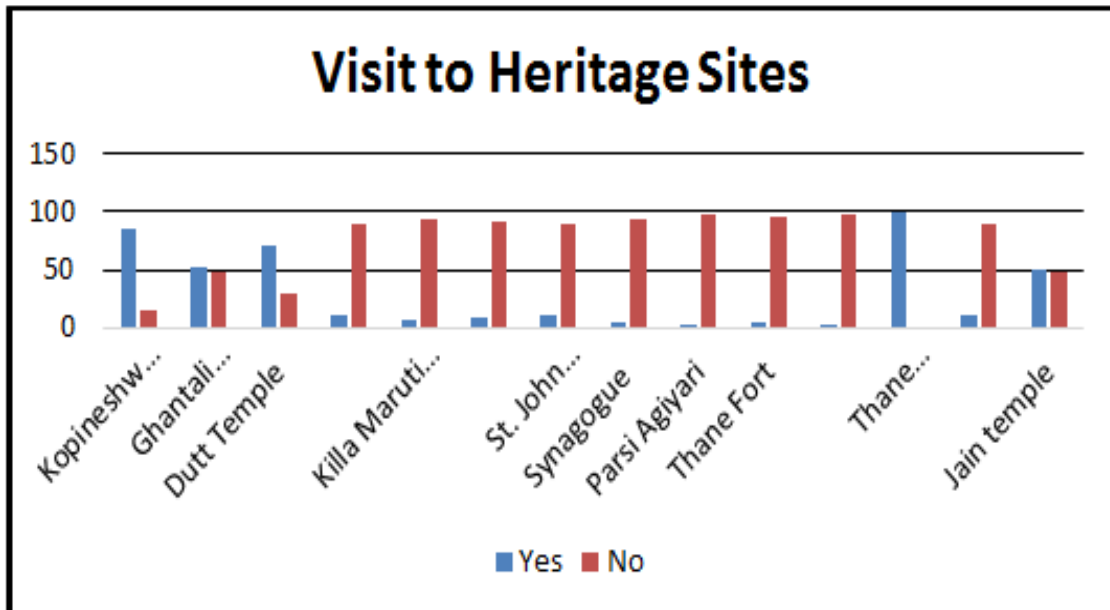


Fig 1

Survey (Figure 1) clearly reflects low awareness among the people about the heritages of Thane city. The analysis shows that 100% people have visited Thane railway Station not because of its historical significance but because of the necessity to commute by the local trains. Kopineswar temple, Ghantali temple, Dutta temple and Jain temple has gained popularity because of religious fervent. Churches are popular only among Christian community. Less number of people visited Synagogue and

Parsi Agiyari because these are the religious monuments of Jews and Parsis which are restricted only to their religious communities. Thane fort is prohibited for local people because it is used as Jail. Since British period Bivalkar’s Wada and Buvaji Naik’s Wada have been used for administrative purposes. Hence, it is observed that heritage sites existed in Thane are still not recognized for their historical importance.

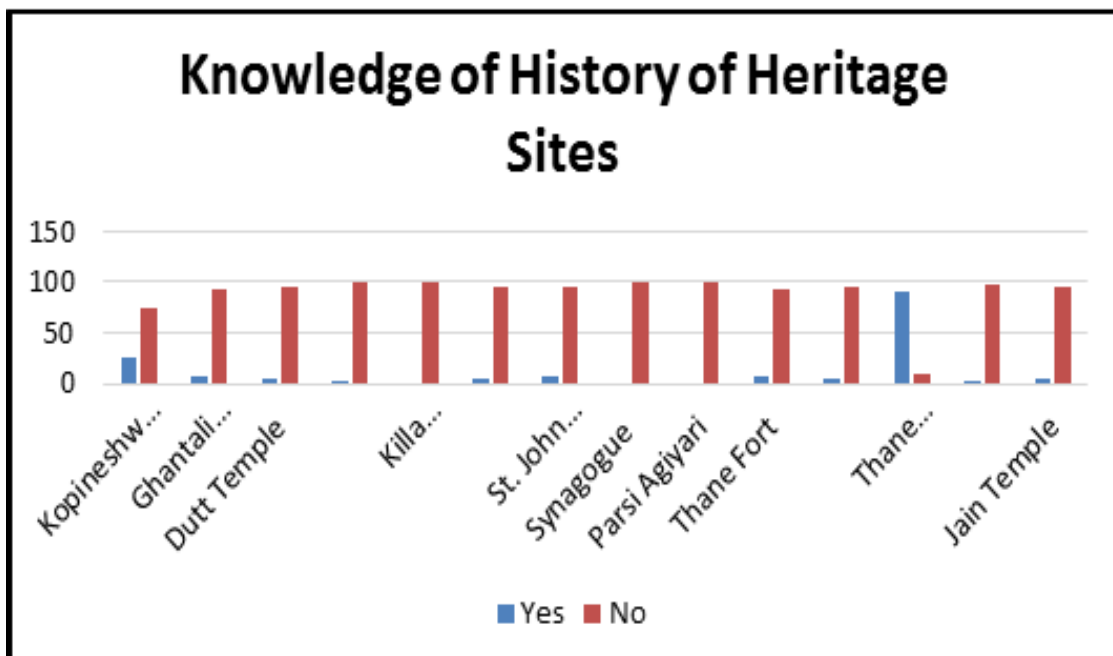


Fig 2

An inference (Figure no. 2) can be clearly drawn about the lack of historical knowledge of people regarding these heritage sites.

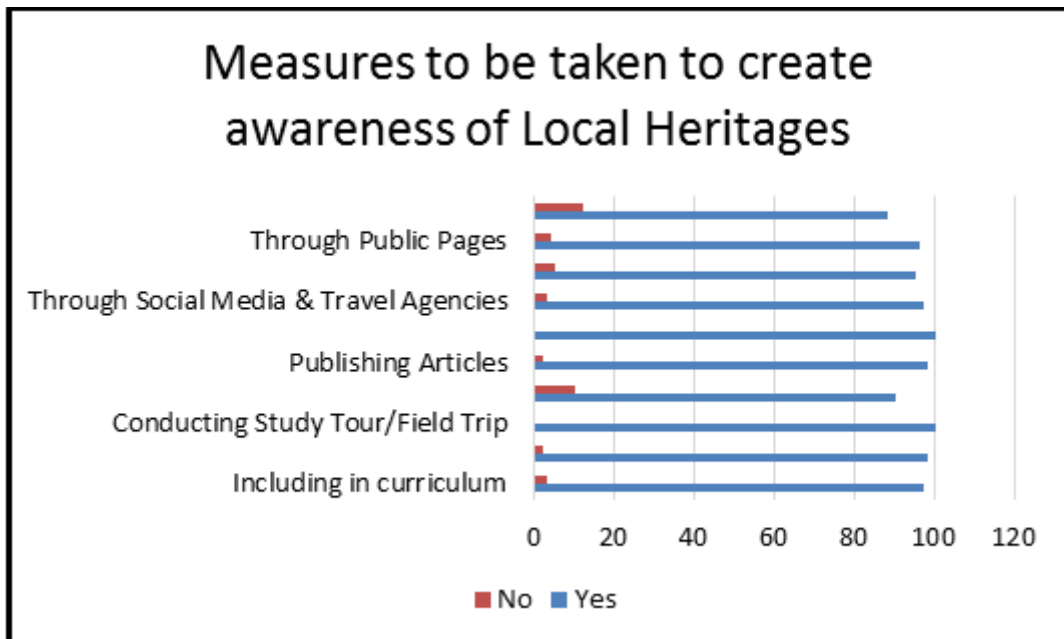


Fig 3

The study (Figure 3) recommended what measures to be taken to create awareness of heritages and history of Thane city. The investigation also collected consent of local people on these recommendations through questionnaire. The analyzed data shows that most of the suggestions given by investigator were agreed by respondents.

Regarding involvement of government to protect heritage sites following recommendations were given by investigators. Almost all suggestions were admitted by residents.

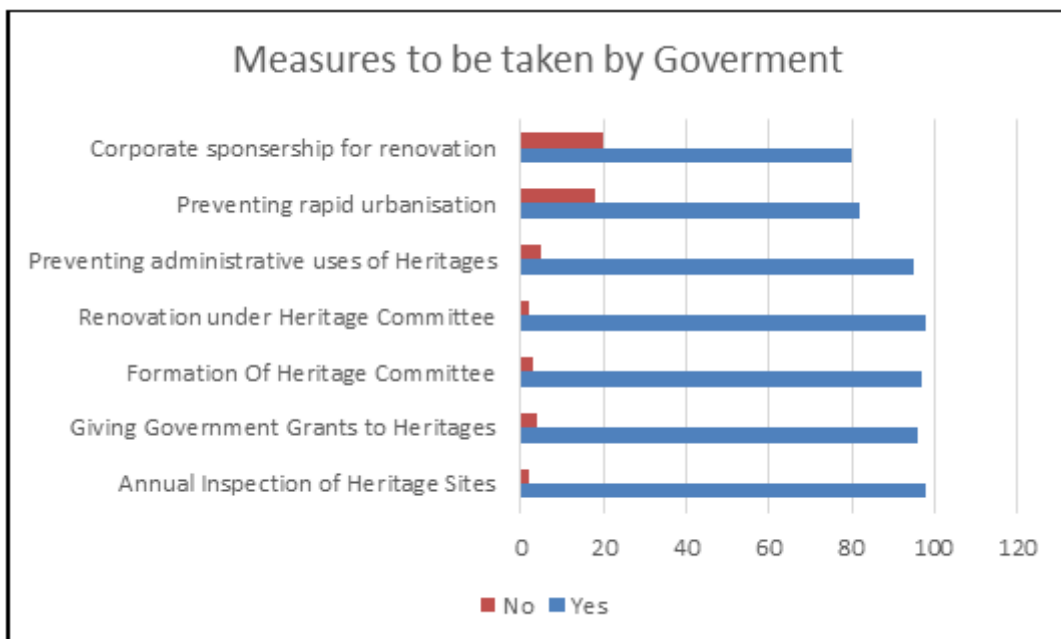


Fig 4

➤ *Some Innovative Ideas of Local Residents to Promote Tourism in Thane*

This study also tried to collect some innovative ideas of residents to promote Thane as a tourist place. Different suggestions were given by Local residents.

- Heritage walk across Thane city
- Starting Thane Darshan tourist buses for city tour.

- Connecting Thane tourism with some outskirts heritage sites for example, Kanheri Caves.
- Putting hoardings in public places displaying the photographs and mentioning the historical importance of heritages in Thane
- Starting water route connecting Vasai, Kalyan, Thane and Belapur on similar lines as of Kerala Back water

- Starting ferry services through Thane creek connecting Gateway of India.
- Establishing a tribal museum at Yeoor hills
- Setting up museum for heritage objects, old city photographs and arts & craft museum
- Encouragement to publish books and articles on history and historical places of Thane
- Collaboration with the Government, Stakeholders, historians, curators etc.
- Including history of Thane city as well as heritage sites in curriculum
- Publicizing local handicrafts and folk culture of Thane
- Promoting local fairs and festivals
- Restricting heritage sites for administrative use.

IV. CONCLUSION

The present study tried to explore the potentiality of Thane city to remake it as heritage tourism Centre. A profound observation of the heritage sites led to a conclusion that lack of maintenance of heritage sites and poor awareness local people were major reasons behind less development of Tourism in Thane. It is noted that many architectural structures have been still used for administrative purposes. Some structures are present in dilapidated condition due to negligence of government and lack of awareness of public. Though heritage committee has been formed to look after the condition of heritage structures yet it is not very active so far. Few historians have been constantly taking efforts to revive the history of Thane and to create awareness among the people of the city in various ways. A survey was undertaken by the present study to understand the level of awareness among the local residents regarding the heritage sites which clearly reflects very less awareness among the people about the heritages of Thane city. According to historical evidences, Thane creek had played an important role in ancient trade. It is also a valuable natural heritage for Thane city. Today continuous growing slum area and encroachment on the both the sides of creek, is alarming not only for its natural beauty but also destruction of natural habitats and marine life. Rapid urbanization has taken place in Thane city. The city is booming with new constructions. Suburb areas are growing fast far beyond its former limits. Thane Municipal Corporation has a broad plan for its development but over emphasis is given on road and flyover construction and infrastructure development. There is no significant planning to protect and preserve this historic sites of the city. This research work highlighted the potentiality of Thane to be a good heritage tourism centre. To boost tourism sectors in Thane it is essential to connect heritage tourism to cultural tourism, religious tourism, mall tourism, adventure tourism, water tourism etc. This work strongly recommends government, stakeholders and community involvement in development of tourism sector.

¹ Thane Municipal Corporation, Official website

² Gazetteer of India, Maharashtra State, Thane district,1982,p1079

³ Ibid,p1080

⁴ Gazetteer of India, Maharashtra State, Thane district,1982,p1079

⁵ Ibid,p1079

⁶ Ibid, p1086

⁷ Ibid,p1085

⁸ Ibid,1086

⁹ Ibid,1087

¹⁰ Ibid,p75

¹¹ Kute Vijaya & Kute Moreshwer,Dev Darshan Jila Thane,p 75

¹² Ibid 93

¹³ Ibid,95

¹⁴ Gazetteer of India, Maharashtra State, Thane district,1982,p1085

¹⁵ Ibid, p 1085

¹⁶ Ibid, p 1085

¹⁷ Ibid, p 1085

¹⁸ Bombay Gazetteer p,352

¹⁹ Gazetteer of India, Maharashtra State, Thane district,1982, p 1084

²⁰ Ibid, p 1084

²¹ Ibid, p1084

²² Tetvilkar Sadashiv ,p Vikhurla Itihas Khunha, P 138-139

²³ Dawood Dalvi ,Ase Gadle Thane, p 89