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**Nav Shakti Utsav: Transforming Bhakti into Shakti through Women
Empowerment and Cultural Event Management in Pune: A Case Study**

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Peer Review Information	Abstract
<p><i>Submission: 15 Feb 2026</i></p> <p><i>Revision: 02 March 2026</i></p> <p><i>Acceptance: 25 March 2026</i></p> <p>Keywords</p> <p><i>Women Empowerment, Experiential Learning, Cultural Event Management, Navratri Festival, Participatory Engagement</i></p>	<p>Women empowerment in India requires innovative, culturally rooted, and experiential approaches that extend beyond conventional policy frameworks and awareness programs. This study examines Nav Shakti Utsav, a unique cultural and empowerment event conducted in Pune on 21 March 2026 during Chaitra Navratri. Conceptualized and organized by Pallavi Deshpande, Founder of Pallavi's Management, the event introduced an innovative model called the "Bhakti to Shakti Walk," transforming devotional practices into experiential empowerment. The event creatively integrated spirituality with modern professional identities by associating each participant with the nine forms of Goddess Durga (Nav Durga), symbolizing strength, leadership, creativity, and resilience across diverse professions. This symbolic mapping bridged the gap between divine representation and real-life roles, making empowerment both relatable and experiential. A distinctive feature of the event was the active participation and role-based representation. Madhuri Deshpande led the Durga Puja, reinforcing the spiritual essence, while Adwita recited Durga Shlokas, enhancing the devotional atmosphere. A young participant, Vivan, symbolically represented Lord Ganpati and efficiently coordinated the event as a "little master," showcasing leadership among children. The event also incorporated engaging and motivational activities such as a Durga Quiz, musical chair, and felicitation ceremonies to recognize participants, thereby boosting confidence and social validation. These activities fostered emotional engagement, collective participation, and a sense of achievement among women. Using a qualitative case study approach through observation, participation, and documentation, the study finds that ritual based and participatory event models significantly enhance identity formation, self confidence, and emotional connection. The study concludes that culturally embedded event management practices like Nav Shakti Utsav can serve as powerful, scalable frameworks for women empowerment, effectively transforming Bhakti (devotion) into Shakti (strength) through meaningful participation and symbolic engagement.</p>

Introduction

India's socio cultural landscape is deeply embedded in traditions, rituals, and symbolic narratives that shape collective identity and social behavior. Festivals are not merely religious observances but function as powerful platforms for social interaction, cultural continuity, and value reinforcement. Among these, Navratri stands as a significant celebration of feminine divine energy, represented through the nine forms of Goddess Durga.

The concept of Shakti symbolizes strength, resilience, creativity, and transformation qualities inherently associated with women across historical and contemporary contexts. Despite this symbolic reverence of feminine power in cultural traditions, a significant disconnect exists between symbolic acknowledgment and real world empowerment. Modern empowerment initiatives have largely focused on education, legal reforms, financial independence, and skill development. While these interventions are critical, they often lack emotional resonance and participatory engagement. Empowerment is not solely a structural phenomenon; it is also psychological, requiring identity validation, self recognition, and emotional reinforcement.

This gap highlights the need for innovative approaches that combine cultural familiarity with experiential engagement. Cultural frameworks provide a unique advantage due to their

Deep rooted acceptance, emotional connection, and societal legitimacy.

In this context, Nav Shakti Utsav, conceptualized and executed by Pallavi's Management in Pune, represents a pioneering effort to reinterpret traditional festivals as platforms for empowerment. The event transforms Navratri from a ritualistic celebration into a participatory model of identity construction and social recognition.

A key innovation within this framework is the Bhakti to Shakti Walk, which redefines devotional practices as experiential empowerment processes. This case study explores how such culturally rooted event management practices can serve as tools for social transformation.

Literature Review

The relationship between culture, participation, and empowerment has gained increasing attention in interdisciplinary research across sociology, psychology, and event management. Bishnoi (2020) conceptualizes Navratri as a symbolic representation of feminine strength, emphasizing its role in reinforcing gender identity through cultural narratives. Festivals act

as symbolic systems that shape societal perceptions of gender roles and power structures.

UNESCO (2022) highlights cultural events as instruments for social inclusion, identity formation, and community cohesion. Cultural participation enhances social belonging and strengthens collective identity, particularly among marginalized groups.

Sharma and Gupta (2023) explore the psychological dimensions of ritual participation, concluding that structured rituals enhance emotional engagement, belongingness, and self-perception. Rituals create a sense of continuity and meaning, enabling participants to internalize symbolic experiences.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (2021) further supports this perspective by suggesting that transformation occurs through active participation, reflection, and experience. Learning is not limited to cognitive processes but is deeply influenced by emotional and experiential engagement.

Problem Statement

Contemporary women empowerment initiatives predominantly focus on awareness programs, policy implementation, and skill development. While effective at a structural level, these approaches often fail to create emotional engagement and personal transformation.

Event management, despite its ability to influence large audiences and create immersive experiences, remains underutilized as a tool for empowerment. Traditional symbolic frameworks such as Nav Durga possess immense transformative potential but are rarely contextualized within modern identities.

Additionally, there is a lack of structured participatory models that actively involve individuals in empowerment processes rather than positioning them as passive recipients.

This study addresses the need for a model that integrates culture, participation, and empowerment through experiential engagement.

Research Gap

Despite extensive theoretical research, there is a lack of structured event-based empowerment models that integrate Nav Durga symbolism with modern professional identities. Existing studies give limited attention to participatory ritual frameworks and experiential approaches within event management. Additionally, there is no documented model like the "Bhakti to Shakti Walk" that transforms cultural practices into empowerment tools.

This study addresses these gaps by presenting Nav Shakti Utsav as an integrated model

combining cultural symbolism, experiential learning, and participatory engagement for women empowerment.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze Nav Shakti Utsav as an innovative event based empowerment model
- To evaluate the Bhakti to Shakti Walk as an experiential framework
- To examine the role of cultural symbolism in identity construction
- To assess the impact of participatory rituals on women empowerment
- To develop a scalable and replicable model for cultural event management

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach, which enables an in depth exploration of a single event as a unit of analysis. The design is both descriptive and exploratory, focusing on understanding the structure, processes, and outcomes of the event.

Case Study Approach

The case study method is appropriate as it allows detailed examination of real life contexts and complex social phenomena. Nav Shakti Utsav is treated as a unique case representing the intersection of culture, empowerment, and event management.

Data Collection Methods

Multiple qualitative data collection techniques were employed:

a) Participant Observation

The researcher actively observed event activities, participant behavior, engagement levels, and interactions during rituals.

b) Active Participation

The researcher participated in the Bhakti to Shakti Walk and other rituals to gain experiential insights.

c) Field Notes

Detailed notes were recorded during and after the event, capturing observations, reflections, and participant responses.

d) Visual Documentation

Photographs and videos were used to document rituals, symbolic representations, and participant engagement.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants representing diverse backgrounds: Entrepreneurs, Homemakers, Educators, Artists, Social workers

This ensured representation of varied identities and experiences.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, involving:

Data familiarization

Coding of recurring patterns

Identification of themes

Interpretation of findings

Key themes included empowerment, identity, emotional engagement, and recognition.

Event Overview

Event Name: Nav Shakti Utsav

Date: 21 March 2026

Occasion: Chaitra Navratri

Location: Pune

Organizer: Pallavi's Management

The event aimed to transform traditional celebration into a structured empowerment platform.

Conceptual Framework: Nav Durga Representation

The core concept involved mapping real life women to the nine forms of Goddess Durga:

Conceptual Framework: Nav Durga Mapping (Case Based Representation)

A distinctive feature of this case study is the real-life mapping of participants to Nav Durga forms, linking symbolic meaning with professional identity.

Durga Form

Symbolic Meaning

Participant Representation (Case Study)

Shailaputri Strength IT Professional (resilience in corporate field)

Brahmacharini Devotion Adwita – dedication to learning and discipline

Chandraghanta Courage Stationery Business Owner (entrepreneurial courage)

Kushmanda Creativity Creative contributors (event/art support)

Katyayani Leadership Artist (creative leadership and expression)

Skandamata Motherhood

Homemaker (nurturing and caregiving role)

Mahagauri Purity Jewellery Business Owner (precision, aesthetics, purity)

Annapurna Nourishment Chocolate Business Owner (provider and nurturer)

Durga Roop Divine Power Madhuri Deshpande (Spiritual Leader & embodiment of Shakti)

Innovative Framework: Bhakti to Shakti Walk Structure

Circular movement representing continuity

Chanting to enhance emotional engagement

Offerings symbolizing commitment

Collective participation fostering unity

Findings

1. Empowerment through Participation

Active involvement increased confidence and agency among participants.

2. Identity Reinforcement

Symbolic representation helped participants connect with their inner strengths.

3. Emotional Engagement

Rituals created deep emotional and psychological impact.

4. Recognition Impact

Public acknowledgment enhanced self-esteem and social validation.

The case study highlights the following:

- Experiential Participation leads to Empowerment
- Symbolic Mapping strengthens Identity
- Recognition enhances Self-worth
- Cultural Frameworks increase Engagement

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that event management can extend beyond logistical execution to become a tool for social transformation.

The Bhakti to Shakti Walk creates a liminal space where participants transition from symbolic representation to self-realization. This aligns with Turner's theory of ritual transformation.

The integration of cultural symbolism and experiential participation creates a multidimensional empowerment experience addressing both psychological and social dimensions.

Role Based Symbolic Interpretation

Each role in the case study was not only symbolic but also professionally contextualized, making the framework more relatable and impactful:

Teacher as Vidya Devi (Brahmcharini extension): Representing knowledge, discipline, and lifelong learning

Entrepreneurs: Representing independence and leadership

Creative professionals (Artist): Symbolizing innovation and expression

Business owners: Reflecting economic empowerment and resilience

This mapping created a strong connection between spiritual identity and real life roles.

This case study demonstrates that event management can function as a transformative social tool rather than merely a logistical activity. The case highlights how cultural symbolism, when combined with participation, creates a multidimensional empowerment experience.

Innovative Practice: Bhakti to Shakti Walk

The Bhakti to Shakti Walk formed the core experiential element of the case study.

Structure

Participants carried symbolic ritual items

Walked in a circular path toward the deity

Performed chants representing their assigned Durga form

Repeated the process to reinforce connection

Case Insight

Participants reported: Increased emotional involvement

Stronger identification with their assigned role

A sense of transformation from devotion to empowerment

Observations from the Case Study

1. Identity Transformation

Participants began to associate their personal and professional roles with divine attributes, leading to enhanced self-recognition.

2. Emotional Engagement

The ritualistic environment created a deep emotional connection, making the experience memorable and impactful.

3. Confidence Building

Public recognition and symbolic representation boosted confidence and self-esteem.

4. Social Validation

Participants felt valued and acknowledged within the community, reinforcing empowerment.

Implications

Academic Implications

- Introduces a new interdisciplinary model.
- Expands event management research into empowerment studies
- Connects sociology, psychology, and cultural studies

Practical Implications

- Applicable for NGOs and institutions
- Replicable across regions and cultures
- Useful for designing impactful events

Conclusion

The Nav Shakti Utsav case study demonstrates that culturally rooted event management can act as a powerful tool for empowerment and social transformation.

The inclusion of real-life participant mapping and the Bhakti to Shakti Walk establishes a unique model that connects spirituality with identity and action.

The study confirms that experiential and participatory approaches significantly enhance empowerment outcomes.

The Bhakti to Shakti Walk emerges as a pioneering model that transforms devotion into empowerment. The study establishes that

culturally rooted and participatory approaches significantly enhance the effectiveness of empowerment initiatives.

The model holds strong potential for scalability and replication, making it a valuable contribution to both academic research and practical event management.

Future Scope

- Expansion to national level events
- Comparative case studies across regions
- Integration with academic research and institutions
- Expansion to national and international platforms
- Comparative studies across regions
- Collaboration with academic institutions and NGOs

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No Objection Statement

The authors declare that this research paper is original and does not infringe upon any copyright. All participants provided consent for observation and documentation. There is no objection to the publication of this research in any academic journal or conference.