



Heritage Conservation –Meaning and Indian Scenario

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ABSTRACT: As individuals, as communities and as nations, the very conception of ourselves viz. who are we, where have we come from, from where we have grown up is largely rooted in the past. Likewise, the history of our village, towns and countries, memories (both individual and social), help us preserve the past and connect us to places and to other people. We preserve these memories in a variety of forms, from personal journals and photographs to items with broader cultural significance, such as traditional dances, textiles, or buildings and monuments. The objects and traditions that preserve these memories, to be passed from generation to generation, are collectively referred as individual or cultural heritage.¹

KEYWORDS: heritage, conservation, culture, preserve, tradition, generation

I. INTRODUCTION

But what exactly does individual or cultural heritage include? The very concept of cultural significance of heritage implies a process of judging and selecting. Imagine that you have a large collection of photographs in your possession, which documents every single activity of your life. But are all of the photographs that you have in your possession worth keeping just because they are part of your past ? If you decided to keep only some of the images, how would you decide which ones to keep? You might choose some photographs for their emotional or religious appeal, their aesthetic value, their uniqueness, or for what they might teach to your descendants. Every individual would, therefore, have his or her own approach to the question that how many of the photographs should be preserved, and the reason why they should be preserved.[1,2,3]

On a larger scale, likewise, nations and cultures have to make similar decisions about how to preserve the traditions, monuments, landscapes that make up their heritage, or whether these things should be preserved at all. The problem of selection is further complicated by the fact that the concepts of heritage and culture are fluid, open to continual revision. Culture, in particular, is an unbounded term—a single culture may contain many minority views, subgroups, and even countercultures that share varying degrees of common ideas, customs, and values. Preserving—or destroying—the past in any form is often a contentious issue, deeply embedded in local politics and shifting conceptions of cultural identity.²

One of the fundamental issues that arises in the conservation process is the conflict between economic development and historic preservation. Conserving an ancient religious site in a crowded urban area, for example, might prevent the construction of an office building that could provide jobs for many people. Similarly, the building of a dam, or a factory could dramatically boost a local economy, but at the expense of an increasingly rare patch of wetlands. People often disagree about which goal is more important. Those who advocate progress might argue that historic buildings should be replaced with more modern, efficient constructions, or that tracts of green land should be developed for human settlements and commercial activities. On the other hand, people in favour of preservation might say that historic buildings and natural sites are more important as they are irreplaceable and that the value they add to our overall cultural richness is greater than that of potential economic development.

Importance and the role of international organizations

Ultimately, the question of who is responsible for making such decisions of conservation and preservation of heritage arises. Many countries do make efforts to protect valued urban and rural sites as historic districts, wildlife preserves, or public parks, often administered at the local, state, and national levels. But not all countries have sufficient infrastructure and the resources to carry out such programs effectively. Moreover, certain natural and man-made forces such as pollution, urban development, and political unrest continually threaten places perceived as valuable.

As a result, a number of international organizations ³ have been founded to help identify and preserve places of historical and cultural significance, based on the belief that sites representing a common human heritage are the responsibility of the world community rather than of an individual country. The main international bodies pursuing this



mission are the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), [4,5,6]the World Monument Fund, and the World Heritage Committee (WHC). ICOMOS was founded in 1965 as an international organization of conservation specialists. It sets standards for the conservation and restoration of cultural monuments, provides a professional forum for discussions of conservation techniques and management of monuments, and serves as a consulting authority to governments and the WHC. IUCN was founded in 1948 and focuses on the conservation of natural resources.⁴ The organization consists of governments, government agencies, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). ICCROM is an intergovernmental organization that was founded in 1956. It provides restoration training and expertise for cultural property, including movable objects such as paintings. The World Monument Fund, also founded in 1965, is a nonprofit international organization that seeks to safeguard architecturally important monuments and works of art. It identifies sites that are in danger of destruction and attempts to bring together local communities and governments with private support in preservation efforts.⁵

The World Heritage Committee (WHC) was founded by UNESCO in 1972 to conserve and protect examples of world heritage, specifically monuments, groups of buildings, and natural sites of universal value. World Heritage Sites, are the places of significant historic and cultural value throughout the world, selected for preservation by the World Heritage Committee⁶. This intergovernmental organization, which is responsible for cataloging and protecting World Heritage sites, operates under the direction of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It was established to implement the terms of the World Heritage Convention, an agreement adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972. The convention states that a World Heritage Committee “will establish, keep up to date, and publish” a World Heritage List of cultural and natural properties, submitted by member states and considered to be of universal value. To date, 180 nations have signed the convention.⁷

The World Heritage Committee attempts to promote cooperation among nations to protect the worldwide heritage that is recognized as being of such universal value that its conservation is a concern for all people. The convention is legally binding on signatory countries that must help identify, protect, conserve, and transmit to future generations World Heritage properties. When a site is nominated, experts conduct a careful investigation into its merits. The World Heritage[5,6,7] Fund offers technical and financial assistance, and helps provide emergency assistance in the case of properties severely damaged by specific disasters or threatened with imminent destruction.

The World Heritage sites include monuments, sculpture and paintings, cave dwellings, architecturally significant buildings, and places of natural importance. Cultural sites outnumber natural sites by a ratio of about four to one. By 2006 there were more than 800 World Heritage sites in 137 countries. They include the Great Barrier Reef off the coast of Australia; the Taj Mahal in India; the Galápagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador, where Charles Darwin made studies that led him to develop his theory of natural selection; and the island of Gorée in West Africa, where from the 17th through the 19th centuries holding cells detained enslaved Africans awaiting deportation to the Americas. World Heritage sites in the United States include the Grand Canyon in the southwestern United States; Independence Hall in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the Taos Pueblo in New Mexico. The World Heritage Committee also maintains a register of World Heritage in Danger, which lists mainly natural sites and in 2005 included 35 areas in 29 countries.⁸

As of 2014, there are a total of 1007 World Heritage Sites located in 161 countries. Of the 1007 sites, 779 are cultural, 197 are natural and 31 are mixed properties. While there are 32 World Heritage Sites in India that are recognized by UNESCO and out of them 25 are cultural sites, and the other 7 are natural sites.⁹ To date, more than 161 nations have signed the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, agreeing to assist in the preservation of sites located within their borders. The Convention functions as an international legal instrument governing the preservation and maintenance of cultural and natural heritage sites. With such widespread participation and global coverage, the WHC is the most influential organization for defining, conserving, and protecting places deemed significant to the heritage of humankind. The WHC classifies sites into one of two major categories: cultural sites and natural sites. According to the WHC *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, cultural sites are selected according to the following criteria¹⁰:

Cultural heritage properties should : (i) represent a masterpiece of human creative genius, or (ii) exhibit an important interchange of human values over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town planning or land scape design, or (iii) bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or has disappeared, or(iv) be an outstanding example of a type of building or architectural or technological ensemble, or landscape[8,9,10] which illustrates a significant stage or significant stages in human history, or (v) be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement or land use which is representative of a culture or cultures, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change, or (vi) be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with

ideas or with beliefs, or with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance (a criterion used only in exceptional circumstances, and together with other criteria).

In the years since its founding, the WHC has added two subcategories of cultural sites: cultural industrial sites, which are historically significant because of industrial development, and cultural landscapes, areas where people have formed a particularly strong relationship with the land. Cultural landscapes are areas where the inhabitants have a special relationship with the landscape.

According to the WHC operational guidelines, natural sites must meet the criteria listed below:

Natural properties should : (i) be outstanding examples representing major stages of the earth's history, including the record of life, significant ongoing geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features, or

(ii) be outstanding examples representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals, or (iii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance, or (iv) contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

Because it is not always easy to separate the cultural significance of a place from its natural significance, the WHC has named 20 mixed sites that meet some of the criteria for both cultural and natural sites. An example is the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu in Peru. This site was selected in 1983 because it fulfilled the first and third criteria for cultural sites, and the second and third criteria for natural sites. Located high in the Andes, the historic home of the Incan Empire mixes the natural beauty of its magnificent setting with the valuable archaeological remains of an Incan city.

Similarly, countries also nominate sites within their own borders to be added to the World Heritage List. ICOMOS, ICCROM, and IUCN serve as advisers in evaluating a site for appropriateness as a World Heritage Site. In general, countries are eager to have their sites added to the World Heritage List, since the designation of sites often translates into enhanced financial and technical resources as well as increased tourism. Although the convention is a legally binding document, in practice it is the distinction, the economic benefits, and the conservation expertise that accompany designation as a heritage site that cause countries to actively seek recognition by the WHC.

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The World Heritage sites include monuments, sculpture and paintings, cave dwellings, architecturally significant buildings, and places of natural importance. Cultural sites outnumber natural sites by a ratio of about four to one. As discussed earlier, there are a total of 1007 World Heritage Sites, at present, located in 161 countries. Of the 1007 sites, 779 are cultural, 197 are natural and 31 are mixed properties. While there are 32 World Heritage Sites in India that are recognized by UNESCO as of 2014 and out of them 25 are cultural sites, and the other 7 are natural sites¹¹ They include Kaziranga wild life sanctuary, Assam, Manas wildlife sanctuary, Assam, Mahabodhi temple complex at Bodhi Gaya, Bihar, Humayun's tomb, Delhi. Kutub Minar and its monuments, Delhi, Red Fort complex, Delhi, Churches and Convents of Goa, Champaner-Pavagadh archaeological park, Gujarat, group of monuments at Hampi, Karnataka, group of monuments at Pattadakal. Karnataka, Buddhist monuments at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, rock shelters of Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh, Khajuraho group of monuments, Madhya Pradesh [10,11,12], Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta caves at Maharashtra, Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus formerly Victoria Terminus, Maharashtra, Sun temple, Konark, Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, Jaipur, great living Chhola temples, Tamil Nadu, group of monuments at Mahabalipuram, Agra Fort, Uttar Pradesh, Fatehpur Sikri, Uttar Pradesh, Taj Mahal, Uttar Pradesh, Mountain Railways of India, Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers National Park, Uttarakhand, Sundarbans National Park, West Bengal, Western Ghats, Hill forts of Rajasthan (Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh, Ranthambore, Amber sub cluster, Jaisalmer, Gagron, Rajasthan), Rani ki Vav, Patan, Gujarat and Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh.¹²

Difficulties and Challenges in Heritage Conservation

Although the increased revenue from tourism to World Heritage Sites can provide more resources for preservation, the corresponding increase in traffic can have severely damaging effects. Industrial development poses a threat to urban monuments and natural parks alike. Heritage sites may also be threatened by war, overpopulation, or pollution. If a country does not adequately protect and maintain an inscribed site, the WHC can place it on a special listing called the List of World Heritage in Danger and can ultimately remove the site from the World Heritage List altogether.



Cities and nations often face difficult decisions about how to ensure the best economic opportunities for their citizens while preserving important sites of cultural identity and heritage. The WHC provides much of the funding as well as the prestige of its parent body, the United Nations (UN), to the preservation of sites around the world deemed important to our human heritage. Although the WHC and its affiliated organizations cannot prevent natural disasters, war, or the machinations of politics, they do direct much-needed aid and technical expertise to the sites included on the World Heritage List. More importantly, the WHC acts as a catalyst, directing attention to the places of our shared heritage and promoting international consensus on the necessity of preserving these places that embody our individual and collective memory.[12]

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