Champaner-Pavagadh – Managing conflicts – A conservation challenge

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**ABSTRACT:** The present paper focuses on the experiences gained, methods used and attitudes assumed while formulating a management system for the Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park. It brings out the conflicts which occur when there are several stake holders managing the site; who have good intention but narrow rather limited purview of action and vision; and ponders whether solutions to these conflicts can be prioritised with mutual consent as a strategy for effective conservation management of the site.

**1 BACKGROUND**

Champaner-Pavagadh Archaeological Park is a highly complex heritage site with a 16th century medieval Sultanate capital city buried beneath a thick forest cover and landscape characterised by plateaus, mounds and streams. (Refer Figure 1). Although stripped off its glorious past and since forgotten; it is widely visited by pilgrims from all over the western region of India as it is one of the Shakti Peeths and also an important Jain pilgrimage centre. (Refer Figure 2).

Today, with obscure Rajput and Sultanate structures (Refer Figure 3), buried city, temples, myths and legends passed down since generations by word of mouth; Champaner-Pavagadh is really a most illustrious example of a heritage site with diverse heritage components viz., natural, built, traditional knowledge systems and intangible heritage. It spreads over an area of approximately 14 sq. km Core Zone and 30 sq. km Buffer Zone. (Refer Figure 4).

The earliest settlements occurred on the hill during the Rajput regime around 9th century and since then several consecutive settlements have come about on its various plateaus. Each settlement had its own self sufficient water system making it a unique water-intelligent city.
2 PRESENT STATUS OF SITE MANAGEMENT

Champaner-Pavagadh was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2004. This is the only example in India to have been recognised as a site and not as a city or a group of monuments; and is the only one to have met four out of the six criteria. What is unique about this site is its authentic pre-Mughal Sultanate evidence lying absolutely untouched courtesy the overgrown forest. This authenticity makes it a very significant knowledge resource.

Today, the site is being managed by several stakeholders who are either owners of some heritage component or are instrumental in the management of it. They vary in their aims towards the site and although well-intentioned they are frequently tied down by limited purview of action and vision. Hence any step towards an integrated conservation of the site leads to more often than not a status-quo.

3 CONFLICTING AIMS OF STAKE HOLDERS

Forest Department has under its purview a large area of the site, mainly the Pavagadh Hill and the buried Sultanate city. The forest act is very powerful and has successfully controlled development in the forest land thereby protecting the authenticity of the site. But, at the same time, its obligation of planting fresh saplings every year has proved to be a big threat to the archaeological heritage. The roots of the plantations are slowly harming the vulnerable heritage buried below the earth. (Refer Figure 5). The overgrown forest also makes accessibility to most structures very difficult leading to their subsequent deterioration.

ASI protects, out of the identified 114 structures, only a mere 55 and that too in isolation. It has created islands of protected territories within the entire Archaeological Park. Paradoxically enough, it was the ASI which nominated this place as a site to WH committee; but when it comes to protection it can not see beyond its 100/300 m absurd irrational law.

To add to that the State Department of Archaeology has just one monument under its jurisdiction i.e., the Gaben Shah Vav. (Refer Figure 6). It protects only those buildings that are more than a 100 years of age and only the ones in stone! Its law does not allow for protection of significant buildings like Iteri Masjid, Rani no Mahal, etc.; simply because they are brick structures, in spite of their being important knowledge resource!

The District Collector and the DDO once spent enormous money and energy constructing the water facility at a heritage site. But it happened to fall within the 300 meter boundary of ASI and had to suffer demolition even before it started functioning. These uncalled-for conflicts and a constant struggle for assertion of one authority over the other are is not helping the site, rather they are wasting resources. A system is needed which enables co-ordination among various government departments.

Gram Panchayat promotes programmes for people’s development like repairing of pilgrims’ path, creation of tourism oriented business opportunity, etc. Recently, Gram Panchayat has constructed a school in
the Gaben Shah precinct! Now they are at logger heads with the State Department of Archaeology. Where to develop and how to develop is not known to them! These people don’t know where to seek answers from and also whether they are really responsible for their provision in the most rightful sense.

The local Panchayat is taking emergency measures to reinstate the traditional water system. The will to conserve and awareness is there among the local leaders, but they lack a professional insight. Such initiatives are a big asset for the site. The need is to create situations for methodical interventions enabling convenience to whoever is concerned and empowered to take actions.

Temple trust like that of Shahji Sawai nu Deru has a precinct within the Royal Enclosure. It has already developed it as a neat RCC structure having dharamshalas and a new structure over the original mazar. As it is a private property, the trust has the freedom to develop the site as it wishes. In such situation it becomes questionable whether a uniformity and sympathetic growth is valid at all or not. If it is so, there is a lack of system that can ensure a sensitive-responsibility and an effective monitoring mechanism without one body being assertive over the other.

The living temples, which are of archaeological value, are being modified beyond recognition in the name of loving care and maintenance. Take for example, Jai Mataji Temple Trust has created fortifications and loud RCC platforms for the ‘convenience of the pilgrims’. (Refer Figure 7). Even the pilgrims are happy about it. But the cultural value of the precinct is gone for a six. But again, conservation professionals have no right to ‘preserve’ the sanctity of this place as they understand simply because they are convinced about its value for their profession’s sake alone. What is actually needed is a system which discourages haphazard interventions, and encourages pertinent development strategies resonant of the cultural values of the place?

PWD has proposed widening of the State highway that passes thru the site and it also seeks to widen the road going up to Machi! Now, if the priority is effective transportation of the people, road widening cannot be the only solution. (Refer Figure 8). They are oblivious to or are ignorant about proposals of battery operated vehicles vying between the visitor centre and Machi so as relieve parking pressures on the Machi plateau. The state highway has been proposed to be re-routed to avoid thorough traffic in the site. But the proposals at times fail to reach the right target, hurdling effective implementation.

Champaner-Pavagadh is a water-intelligent city, envisaged so in the Rajput times and refined during the Sultanate era. At one point of time, it catered to a populace of 50,000 today it is unable to quench a mere 5,000 owing to sheer lack of knowledge about the traditional water system. In spite of recent researches and local campaigns Irrigation Department wishes to remain oblivious to such knowledge and is proposing a huge subsidiary canal from Narmada canal to be brought in to Wada Talao destroying the heritage underneath. When there are ways of avoiding destruction authorities responsible should take sympathetic attitudes, rising above individual agendas. Perhaps in the light of a missing management system, such conflicts are bound to occur.

Field owners have been carrying out agricultural activities for over 200 years now, which have already resulted in the loss of important archaeological evidence. They need to irrigate their fields and so creation of canals, digging, etc. is widespread. Their interest is their right. Then the academic conservation becomes weak for management of such a heritage site. Amity has to be ensured between these conflicting situations.

NGOs like Heritage Trust have no ownership, but they have in their kitty ‘concerned and sensitive professionals’ and so were entrusted the task of repairing Malik Sandal ni Vav at Mandvi village. The conservation intervention may have been done correctly; it may have had flaws too? Who monitors such actions? The funding agency is merely concerned about the immediate product-oriented targets set and is blithe about the
relevance of individual interventions vis-à-vis the overall site. (Refer Figures 9, 10). Because such projects can only be granted to individual professionals, there is a need for a system that safeguards a consistency among all such individual conservation interventions in such a complex site.

Residents of the Champaner village who unfortunately stay within the Royal Enclosure cannot even get a toilet constructed in their house, because it falls within the ASI protection. (Refer Figure 11). These residents have been staying here long before the enactment of ASI law, yet they have to suffer. It is difficult to ensure hygiene and good lifestyle to local residents if ASI laws remain as stringent without any scope for flexibility.

Tourism Department is happy having their agendas relegated to mere provision of public conveniences when today the site needs educative, interactive, participatory modes of tourism especially, in the wake of this being an intense pilgrimage site and a potential knowledge resource. (Refer Figures 12, 13).

Western railways have an abandoned railway track cutting through the forest on the site. This can innovatively be clubbed with the tourism experience, it being a fantastic resource. A system has to look at potentials and constraints of such resources lying strewn across the site.

A vast number of pilgrims and tourists visiting the site make it very susceptible. They are a major source granting stable economy to the local residents so key
efforts go into pleasing them often overlooking the vulnerability of the site.

4 REASONS FOR OCCURRENCE OF CONFLICTS

Main conflicts arise:
1. Due to non-availability of complete information regarding various issues to each stakeholder.
2. Due to vast amount of cultural resources lying unpossessed and hence unattended by any agenda of any stakeholder.
3. Due to pilgrim/tourist oriented opportunities which make the site economically self-sustained but also highly vulnerable.
4. Due to the presence of a living village whose aspiration of a better lifestyle can never be overlooked on any grounds whatsoever.

5 PROPOSED MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Hence a four point agenda has been formulated which enables management of Information, Cultural Resource, Visitor/Pilgrim, Site or the Physical Resource.

The Management plan proposed is an attempt at prioritising actions and at reducing conflicts if not doing away with them altogether. Govt of Gujarat, with the constant persuasive efforts of Heritage Trust, has recently instituted a legal authority with such intentions. But it is still a long way before various stakeholders open up their constricted vision and co-operate towards a peaceful co-existence. Convenient misinterpretations of the authority by lazy officials are leading to several bottlenecks in the development procedures, yet all efforts are being made to ensure a continued collaborative effort between Panchayat, government bodies and professionals.

6 CONCLUDING REMARK

It is indispensable that Conservation is integral to an Urban Planning Process enabling a Progress-Oriented-Approach because… Heritage is living… ageing… and… it wants to let fade away… to give way to a people’s right to human living conditions.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


