CONSERVATION OF INDIAN HERITAGE SITES: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATED APPROACH

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1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage includes not only significant monuments but comprises heritage sites, historic cities, cultural landscapes and living heritage sites. The widening definition of heritage has made heritage conservation and management very complex and multidimensional. There is a need for a comprehensive understanding of the values associated with these heritage resources, which will enable their protection. The approach of Integrated Conservation puts in place a systematic methodology for the management and protection of these diverse cultural resources and ensures its sustainability for the future generation. This paper highlights the multidisciplinary integrated conservation methodology adopted for the management of Indian heritage sites by examining a few examples.

1.1. The concept of Integrated Conservation

With the acceptance of the fact that heritage is not just monuments alone but also living heritage sites, historic cities, cultural landscapes etc, the international community realized the need for Integrated approach for conservation and protection of heritage. The need to integrate the protection and the management of both rural and urban heritage sites in the planning framework in a regional context was recognized by all. The concept of integrated conservation was first introduced in the year 1975 through European Charter for Architectural heritage and the Declaration of Amsterdam. These charters spell out the need for integration of the concerns of heritage in the urban and regional planning frameworks to protect the diverse cultural resources. Further a need was felt for adequate legal, administrative, technical and financial support. The participation of both local authorities and citizens in conservation of the heritage resources is essential component of Integrated Conservation. The Declaration notes the importance of promoting methods, techniques, and skills for restoration and rehabilitation.

1.2. Sustainable development and Integrated Conservation

The concept of “Sustainability” was initially coined in the Bruntland Report “Our Common Future” which the World Commission on Environment and Development published in 1987 and subsequently, in Rio Earth summit of 1992, the need for a sustainable approach in the environment policies was emphasized. As a follow up to the Earth Summit, Agenda 21 was formed which is an action plan for sustainable development. The implementation of Agenda 21 was intended to involve action at international, national, regional and local levels. The Habitat Agenda adopted by 171 governments in 1996provides approaches and strategies which were set towards the achievement of sustainable development in urban areas of the world. This document spells out the norms for conservation and rehabilitation of historical and cultural heritage in urban, rural areas which are in accordance with the sustainable use of natural and man-made resources. Thus the concept of sustainability bridges the gap between conservation and development.

The international perception of sustainable development is translated into the local context through the approach of Integrated Conservation. Integrated conservation guides sustainable development of the historic environment which is constantly threatened by development pressures and rapid change. This approach emphasizes on management of change which is sensitive to the cultural resources of the area.

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1.3. Integrated Approach in the Indian context
As mentioned above the integrated approach which was first coined in the 1970s was further defined by the principles of sustainability. To address the complexities of Indian heritage sites and ensure their protection, it is essential to adopt an Integrated approach which aims to:
- Bring together and integrate various disciplines for comprehensive understanding of the values of the heritage site
- Adopt a long term vision and action plan for the protection of the values of the site
- Integrate International principles, in the local, national and regional context for the protection of the various cultural resources
- Address the primary concerns of the local people and empower the local community so that they are involved in the decision making process
- Integrating the concerns of heritage in the planning, administrative and legal frameworks
- Establish a rigorous consultative process with all the stakeholders for the management of the site

This approach emphasizes the need to bring together historians, planners, educationists, legal experts, administrators, official and non official stakeholders for the management and protection of the site

2. MANAGING THE HERITAGE SITES IN INDIA
As mentioned earlier the management of Indian heritage sites is extremely complex as we have diverse cultural resources ranging from historic buildings, historic cities to cultural landscapes, interwoven with living traditions and practices. Managing our heritage in the present context amidst various development pressures has necessitated the need for preparation of management plans/conservation plans. These plans envisage to protect and preserve the values associated with various cultural resources for the present and the future generations. Management plans are thus multidisciplinary in nature and their preparation revolves around the principles of integrated conservation.

Management plans specify the long term, medium term and short term goals, decisions and actions for the protection of the values of the sites. Managing heritage should ensure adequate planning, effective implementation and monitoring. Implementing the Management plan is a challenge in our heritage sites as we have to deal with multiple stakeholders, complex ownerships patterns and various development pressures.

As per the operational guidelines of UNESCO it is mandatory that all World Heritage Sites must have a management plan for protection of the Outstanding Universal values of the site. Accordingly ASI had undertaken the preparation of the management plan for Red Fort and Hampi. The management plan for Red Fort was finalized in 2009 and is being implemented onsite and it is currently in the process of finalizing the management plan for Hampi. While working with ASI, I realized the role of the nodal agency, Archaeological survey of India is extremely crucial at every stage of the preparation and finalization of these management plans.

2.1. Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for Hampi
Hampi, located in Karnataka is a living heritage site inscribed in the World Heritage list in 1986. The Integrated Management Plan for Hampi has highlighted the need for a multidisciplinary integrated approach for management of this complex site. The management of cultural resources within the existing frameworks has been evolved in accordance with the Operational Guidelines for World Heritage Sites published by UNESCO. This plan has examined existing national, regional and local planning instruments and has highlighted the need for integration of the local concerns in accordance with the international principles.

As Hampi is a living heritage site having traditional systems of management and practices, the Integrated Management Plan for Hampi aims to integrate these traditional practices in the current plan so that there is continuity in belief, thought and practice.

This management plan has emphasized the need for a rigorous consultative process which enables constant dialogue with the local custodians of the site both the official, and non official stake holders. To finalize the Hampi management plan a stakeholder consultative process was initiated by the Archaeological Survey of India, where in the forest department, agriculture, health and hygiene, mining ,tourism, department and so on were taken on board to facilitate in decision making.
Awareness about the values and significance of the heritage site, is shared with all stakeholders and decisions are taken in accordance to the needs and aspirations of the local community. A constant dialogue with the stakeholders has been established and is still ongoing. Thus through this management plan a comprehensive understanding of the site, achieved through an integrated model, is being translated through an effective dialogue to an action plan which safeguards the inherent values of the site.

2.2. The Management Plan for Red Fort

Red Fort located in the city of Delhi is one of the most significant forts built in 1639 by the Mughal Emperor Shahjahan. This fort is a national icon and stands testimony to the various historical events and has structures which belong to the pre-mughal, mughal, later mughal, colonial and post independence period. It is on the ramparts of Red Fort that the national flag was unfurled on 15th August 1947, when India became independent, which continues even today.

Management of this complex fort necessitated the need for a integrated multidisciplinary approach, where in the needs of the official and non official stakeholders were addressed through a multi-disciplinary team of professionals. The team comprised of architects, archaeologists, engineers, landscape experts, GPR experts, conservation professionals, planners, legal experts and material scientists, who addressed the various issues of the management of the site and prepared the Comprehensive Conservation Management plan. The Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan for Red Fort aims to protect the various heritage components of Red Fort and revitalize the Fort to suit the present context. The conservation strategies and actions in the CCMP is based on the 1850 map of Red Fort and Salimgarh.

The understanding of the inherent values and significance of this site was arrived through a systematic methodology of inventoring and mapping of information. This management plan sets certain benchmarks for comprehensive documentation and proved the importance of a dynamic information
database which can be updated regularly. The detailed conservation reports for five mughal structures which are an intricate component of the management plan have highlighted the systematic methodology for addressing the conservation issues of these structures. Various experts were consulted and through a multidisciplinary approach, the Management Plan was prepared and based on the archival information obtained from the 1850 map, appropriate zones were demarcated inside the fort.

2.3. The Archaeological park of Sultan Ghari
The study of the Tomb of Sultan Ghari and its environs, which is a nationally protected monument located in the modern neighbourhood of Vasant Kunj, in South Delhi, on the outcrop of Aravalli Hills emphasized the need for an integrated approach to heritage management. This area was part of the historic water system of Delhi and has one of the oldest and most significant Tombs of Delhi, along with historic settlements. The study integrated the aspects of geography, history and community to understand the significance of the area. A comprehensive understanding of the site, through the approach of Integrated conservation lead to the delineation of the Archaeological park of Sultan Ghari, for the protection of the tomb and the settlement around it. The current Master Plan of Delhi has adopted the Archaeological park of Sultan Ghari, thereby integrating the protection of heritage in the existing planning framework.

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