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by the ASI. It was agreed that the ASI would continue to employ private contractors for maintenance and maintenance of pumps. Water bodies, pathways and gardens would be the responsibility of the horticulture department. Continuous public and media interest would ensure that internationally accepted standards would be followed.

The press has been of great help in the conservation endeavour. Before the mid-1990s it was rare to see a heritage related story in the national press – it was not a topic considered worthy of regular coverage in the daily newspapers. Today, most newspapers have a dedicated journalist to cover heritage related issues. Some major campaigns have been conducted in the press, among them to save the Lutyens Bungalow Zone, the capital complex which the politician-builder-official nexus has constantly attempted to exploit for commercial interest. The press has also helped raise the profile of conservation work among the general public and bring into the official mainstream. In addition, in order to spread awareness to schoolchildren and college students, we organized regular walks in heritage areas such as Mehrauli and Humayun's Tomb and even conducted teacher training workshops.

A willingness to work with government agencies in a transparent manner, together with ensuring high standards, has resulted in strong public support for conservation. It has enabled us to achieve long term targets in relatively short time frames. If we are to work towards conserving our past for future generations, it is imperative that those associated with conservation work together. It is now time to take steps to ensure that conservation becomes a truly mass movement with the enhanced public interest being converted into public involvement.

Conflicting perceptions

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THE ideal mix of nature and culture preferred by conservationists around the globe is best summarised in the following words of Gifford Pinchot, first Director of the U.S. Forest Service, 'The purpose of conservation: The greatest good to the greatest number of people for the longest time.'

The suggestion to incorporate the needs and aspirations of a wide range of people concerned represents the contemporary trend of conservation in the West and in Australia. With the formal incorporation of Cultural Landscapes as an important component of World Heritage, this enlarged interpretation of heritage has recently begun to be extended to traditional cultures as well through the Unesco-World Heritage Convention. Sites that were inscribed in the past, however, continue to contend with a narrow, primarily architecture-oriented, approach to their management.

While this dilemma has arisen largely because of our recent colonial

past, it has acquired greater salience due to the practical application of ambiguous theoretical concepts propounded by the convention. World heritage sites face a unique challenge in their attempt to balance the demands of their particular socio-cultural and geographical contexts on the one hand and global aspirations on the other. The need to highlight their 'outstanding universal significance' in order for them to be granted this coveted status often results in overlooking other significant associations, thereby generating potential future conflicts in their management.

Before discussing the challenges marking the conservation of world heritage sites, one needs to question the very concept of 'outstanding universal significance' as it dictates the future protection and management of the historic resource. Though a prerequisite for inclusion on the list, this notion has recently faced criticism from various sections around the world. There are, in my view, two objections to the use of this phrase in the context of our heritage.

First, this terminology substantially overlooks the presence and indeed significance of a multiplicity of perceptions associated with our heritage, and instead concentrates upon a particular value or set of values that may have made the building or site worth inscribing. This preconception at the initial stage of nomination tends to create a bias in favour of a particular value or aspect in question and distorts the wider perspective regarding the heritage resource needing protection. This dilemma may be appropriately illustrated with respect to the Taj Mahal World Heritage Site in Agra, India.

As one of the most spectacular buildings in the world, Taj Mahal has earned fame as a magnificent architectural achievement signifying an emperor's boundless devotion to his favourite queen. Having attracted the attention of Lord Curzon during his tenure as Viceroy to India in the early 19th century, the Taj was 'rescued' from being lost to us forever. However, efforts towards its conservation and protection concentrated mainly on its physical fabric. In the pre-colonial era, as indeed in our rural society even today, the local populations had been actively associated with their heritage, worshipping the sacred and using the secular so that all that was considered of value was well looked after. That which fell into disuse meant that it was no longer valued by society (Menon 1994).

When we look back into the past, our cultural and natural resources were being maintained and protected by age-old local management mechanisms. This continues to be the case for many cultural and natural resources and sites in the Indian countryside even today.

However, British colonisation was accompanied by an overriding emphasis on the aesthetic and visual aspects of heritage. That which was magnificent became significant, often disregarding local traditions and associations. As a result the splendour of Taj Mahal, in contrast to other less grand expressions, gained in importance in the eyes of the colonisers.

Taj Mahal was one of the earliest Indian monuments to be inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1983 following criterion (*i*) of the Operational Guidelines to the World Heritage Convention on the rationale that it represented a masterpiece of human creative genius. Its statement of significance further elaborated upon its artistic and architectural splendour. This obsessive preoccupation with the building has since failed to acknowledge the presence and significance of a host of other factors that are of value to this world heritage site. For instance, besides its architectural excellence, its spectacular siting on the river edge as well as its role as the grand culmination to a historical tradition of river-front gardens in Agra is overlooked in the assessment of its cultural significance.

The riverside location of Taj (1631-1648) is an extension of the tradition of residential and pleasure gardens already in existence under previous Mughal emperors since the early 16th century. The range of water-front gardens of the time can easily be identified with the help of an early 18th century map of Mughal Agra that shows 44 such complexes including the Taj and Agra Fort (Koch 2000). As a result, the Yamuna riverbanks today encompass several garden sites and relict features including wells, walls, embankments and towers built from the 16th through to the 18th centuries, besides the prominent buildings of the Taj and Agra Fort.

The extent of this inscribed world heritage site measure 22.44 hectares, whereas the buffer zone follows the conventional idea of a concentric zone around the Taj complex accounting for only the main mausoleum and a few structures in its immediate vicinity. These limited boundaries reflect a restricted, primarily architectural, view to heritage. This narrow vision has ensured that development and environmental pressures continue to threaten the protection and management of this monument.

Barely had the issue of polluting small-scale foundries and factories located in its vicinity been resolved when the Taj was back in the headlines in 2003 because of inappropriate developments in its vicinity. Funded by the state government, the Taj Heritage Corridor Project was designed

to link the Taj, Agra Fort, Etmad-ud-Daula and Chini-ka-Roza monuments to attract more visitors. This proposed tourism complex was envisaged as a 1.25-mile corridor with shopping malls, amusement parks and restaurants on the banks of the Yamuna river which flows behind the Taj Mahal, with 75 acres of land along the riverbed being earmarked for reclamation. This project was sited at a distance of merely 330 yards behind the mausoleum (Devraj 2003).

Even as professionals debate the damaging consequences of such a scheme, it is important to understand why such a daring venture was undertaken in the first place and that too on as significant a site. A narrow interpretation of the resource concentrating mainly on the significance of the building is, in my view, one of the primary causes of this conflict. While the conservationists remain preoccupied with the Taj monument, there is little significance placed on the actual surroundings of the monuments. The absence of a vision or regulations for its setting tempted political and economic forces to cash in on the obvious potential of the larger site.

This difference in perception towards our heritage remains a major dilemma plaguing contemporary conservation practice in India. The different 'agendas' of those responsible for administering the resource and others concerned with its conservation or protection has created many situations similar to that at the Taj.

Since most of the eminent monuments and sites fall under the jurisdiction of the Archaeological Survey of India, a government agency, there are many tricky situations wherein the political decisions remain shortsighted and not in keeping with the best interests of the future of our historic environment. In addition to being a case of conflicting perceptions associated with our heritage, this scenario also demonstrates the risk of giving undue attention to one value (in this case architectural, artistic or aesthetic) while ignoring a host of other factors of significance such as its setting, its place in the historic evolution of design, political and economic pressures, among others.

The other conflict created by the use of the term 'outstanding universal significance' has been appropriately highlighted by Cleere who rejects the assumption that any cultural property can be truly universal when viewed against the entire range of human culture. He argues that '...tradition is by definition regional, national or local rather than universal' (Cleere 1996) and concludes that it is unlikely for a traditional way of life to be deemed universal in the modern world. In the context of world heritage the risk of applying international principles and practices of conservation uniformly to diverse historic environments around the globe is evident in many a case in our own country.

Banerjee (1998) has highlighted this concern stating that many of our heritage sites often languish in obscurity, are difficult to access and may be victims of inappropriate developments resulting in compromising western notions of aesthetics, 'authenticity/integrity', thereby lowering their chances for nomination on the list. However, the aspiration of every nation to be internationally acclaimed for its heritage through representation on the list has resulted in member nations attempting to fulfil the prerequisites of 'authenticity' of the monuments, as well as maintaining and regulating site contexts in keeping with western aesthetics in an attempt to achieve 'outstanding universal significance'.

For example, as in the case of the Taj or the Humayun's Tomb in Delhi, little recognition is given to traditional associations of heritage, at times for ease of categorisation as a monument or site (as required under the convention) or for the lack of recognition of the intangible perceptions that have made our historic environment relevant to us to this day.

The garden tomb of Humayun in Delhi was originally conceived on the banks of River Yamuna, which has now shifted course and is barely visible from the monument. This particular site was chosen for its significance in Islam due to its proximity to the tomb of Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya (built in 1325 AD, with subsequent additions made in the 16th, 17th and 19th centuries), a Sufi saint highly venerated by both Muslims and Hindus.

The tomb of Nizamuddin is a *dargah* or shrine which continues to be actively used for religious and social purposes with regular prayers, functions, festivals and bazaars organised in its vicinity. Though of little particular architectural merit, the shrine is believed to have religiously enriched the larger landscape, resulting in the location of a series of tombs, mosques, fortifications and private dwellings in its vicinity demonstrating an unceasing veneration of this saint over the last few hundred years. One of these numerous buildings is the mausoleum of the second Mughal Emperor Humayun (constructed approximately 1570), which was nominated as a world heritage site in 1993.

Humayun's Tomb had been built in the midst of a large *chahar bagh* (square garden) screened by high walls with gateways to the south and west. This garden of over 30 acres served as more than a mere setting to the monument; it symbolised the

perfect garden in Islam (Moynihan 1980; Nanda 1999) on the banks of a holy river and in proximity of the dargah, an ideal burial place signifying paradise.

However, ignoring many of these associations, the World Heritage Site nomination document for Humayun's Tomb shows a limited site boundary extending only upto the walls of this enclosed garden. To reiterate Cleere's concern, in the nomination there is no mention of the significant traditional associations of the larger site and setting, for instance its riverside location or proximity to the shrine of the saint Hazrat Nizamuddin – the very rationale for the location of the tomb. The statement of significance of this world heritage site extols its architectural and landscape achievements while ignoring the important local religious associations of the place, laying the base for future conflict between other aspirations and present treatment of the resource.

Many of the buildings surrounding Nizamuddin's dargah continue to subserve their original purpose as places for congregational prayer, distribution of food to the poor, ritual bathing and as meditative retreats (Indiainvitation.com 2001). However, this is no longer the case with Humayun's Tomb. In the past those who visited Nizamuddin's dargah would also visit Humayun's Tomb in its vicinity to pay obeisance to the mighty emperor. However, its elevated status as a listed monument of national and now international importance has resulted in restricting access and transforming an auspicious space into an architectural monument of relevance, primarily for tourism.

The ignorance regarding the significance of the larger site, coupled with a need to improve site presentation, often leads to sanitising the vicinity of the building paying little heed to the historicity of the larger site. The horticulture departments of the agencies responsible for the maintenance of the larger sites, in an attempt towards 'beautifying' the site, have created large expanse of lawns and planted contemporary species of ornamental shrubs and trees, thereby further negating the historicity and character of the space.

In demonstrating the inadequacy of the concept of 'outstanding universal significance', I also aim to highlight that it is insufficient to associate a single value to heritage at any given period of time. Not only is heritage associated with more than one value but equally that these values and perceptions change over time as a result of changing concerns. Therefore, traditional associations of use versus western preoccupation with aesthetics are but a few of the many values that may play a significant role in the protection and management of our heritage. Each individual, group of individuals or organisations may perceive and value the historic environment uniquely, depending upon their interaction with it.

Walshe illustrates this by arguing that the significance attached to a group of buildings by architects or architectural historians differs from those that have grown up with these buildings. While the former would associate architectural or historical significance with the resource, the latter may value it for '...the smell, the touch, the sound, the silences of buildings and the way these echo in their memory...' (Walshe 1999). This may be borne out of the association with, or habitual use of, the resource and may therefore make the resource more relevant to their lives.

In order to ensure responsible decision-making and effective management, an in-depth understanding of the historic environment requires illustrating its various values – architectural, historical, ecological, archaeological, social, spiritual and educational – that make it important (Clark 2001). In order to recognise the perceptual values of heritage places, such as meanings for the communities that live and work there or others who are visitors or administrators of the property, one needs to move beyond historical, cultural or ecological attributes (Thackeray 1999).

In keeping with research related to the significance of multiple values of heritage as is being rediscovered in the West, as well as in an attempt to represent the aspirations of traditional cultures, there has been a change in the approach towards world heritage. This broadened definition of heritage beyond buildings and sites has resulted in the adoption of cultural landscapes as a category for nomination to the world heritage list. This change may prove to be highly beneficial for traditional cultures such as ours, as this category acknowledges the 'human dimension' in landscape, emphasising the social, cultural, emotional, spiritual and other associations with heritage. This may be aptly illustrated in the case of the Hampi World Heritage Site.

This world heritage site was inscribed in 1986 as the 'Group of Monuments at Hampi' as it represents the splendour of the Vijayanagara kingdom from the 14th to 16th centuries. However, subsequently in 1999, Hampi was declared a 'site in danger' as a result of construction of two bridges across the Tungabhadra river. This was seen as seriously compromising its significance and authenticity.

Recognising that these conflicts arose as a result of the narrow inter-

pretation of the significance of Hampi as consisting mainly of spectacular built heritage, Unesco specialists have recently suggested that Hampi be re-nominated as a cultural landscape. The Bhimbetka site in Madhya Pradesh is already inscribed as a cultural landscape and the Majhuli Landscape in Assam too is under consideration for inscription under this category. However, renomination of an inscribed site, such as is the case in Hampi, highlights a growing need to understand a heritage property in its entirety. Therefore, if this suggestion is implemented, it would greatly benefit Hampi as it would ensure incorporation of the various natural and cultural values, besides its architectural splendour, that make this site special.

For instance, recognising the exceptional quality of its natural landscape setting of granite boulders and hills and a revered riverscape, as well as the role of man in utilising the environment to his best potential, would be an acknowledgment of man's contribution to the creation of this heritage. Emphasising the need to understand ongoing agricultural and other related activities on site will hopefully help deepen the unique harmonious relationship between man and nature prevailing on this site. In this case, therefore, the dispersed ruins of temples and palace complexes hewn out of natural stone, though truly spectacular, serve merely as one of the many significant layers of this landscape.

As a means of highlighting the complexities of the Hampi world heritage site, as also to understand its myriad values, a series of stakeholder workshops were recently organised by the Archaeological Survey of India in the presence of Unesco specialists. Various concerns of tourism, infrastructure, employment and agriculture were foregrounded, which otherwise may never have been discussed.

Cultural landscapes offer an appropriate platform to discuss the multiple aspirations related to heritage; they also present feasible solutions to deal with the ambiguity of narrow and obsolete concepts of 'outstanding universal significance'. For this reason, this concept has found favour in Australia and some nations of the West. However, in our context, certain issues have already arisen in the implementation of this concept. First, the very notion of incorporating multiple associations implies that larger areas need to be nominated for this purpose giving rise to practical problems of administration and management.

For instance, at Bhimbetka, the management of the core zone spread over 2000 hectares and the buffer zone over 10,000 hectares engulfing 21 tribal villages, is proving to be fairly complicated. Further, while incorporation of multiple associations is a desirable end, in reality prioritising of conflicting interests offers quite a challenge during implementation.

Australia and the West have experimented with a combination of 'conservation planning' and 'management planning' mechanisms – the former to document the cultural significance of the resource and the latter to prioritise the associated perceptions and aspirations through regulations to ensure its future protection. In re-nominating some of our inscribed sites as cultural landscapes, we are acknowledging the presence and significance of multiple perceptions. What remains unclear is whether the management of these multiplicities will demand the development of new mechanisms or whether existing planning instruments will suffice.

To conclude, there is an urgent need to reconsider the practicality of implementing certain theoretical concepts incorporated in the operational guidelines to the Convention. Concepts such as cultural landscapes highlight efforts to undo narrow interpretations of our heritage and emphasise a wider range of significant associations. We will have to wait awhile to discover whether we are indeed capable of effectively dealing with the existing dilemmas facing our inscribed sites as well as those that will doubtless arise as a result of the changing definitions of world heritage.

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