

World Heritage Watch Report 2020



Hampi: Need for an Inclusive and Integrated Approach to Heritage Conservation-Management

Krupa Rajangam and Equations



The World Heritage Site (WHS) of Hampi is a lived landscape. The site is a dynamic, riverine, agricultural, socio-cultural ecological *production landscape*. **The key threat to the site's Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) is the current extremely limited definition and understanding of the site. As a consequence of this, the State Party's approach to management is bereft of community participation.**

In spite of repeated calls to the contrary, including in the site's Integrated Management Plan (IMP), the site remains notified as 'Group of Monuments', a label that is far removed from its everyday realities. The World Heritage Committee (WHC) is aware of the paradox inherent in its mission, namely, trying to conserve certain unique locations for 'all of mankind'. In other words, balancing the unique value of a location with its universal value. This is not easily done. However, successive WH Committees have shown themselves equal to the task of adapting to critiques and correcting past mis-steps.

Within the 4 categories currently available (cultural, natural, mixed, and cultural landscape) Hampi WHS, at the very least, deserves to be recognised as a mixed site. The site existed long before and after its Vijayanagara period of occupation. The region has rich biodiversity and is of geological, prehistoric, cultural, mythological and ecological signifi-

cance. Currently, besides settlements, villages, agricultural fields, orchards and water systems, its 236 sq.km boundary also encompasses parts of a sanctuary for the endangered sloth bear, while sections of the River Tungabhadra that flows through the core zone are inscribed as a preserve for two species of river otters. Both the sloth bear and the river otters are listed as 'Vulnerable' in the IUCN Red List.

This complex landscape speaks to both living culture and ecology. For instance, the living agricultural system and living water system is linked with the living cycle of festivals and rituals in different parts of the site. They broadly culminate in the *Virupaksha Jathre*, the annual festival of the region's tutelary deity (the temple sits in the heart of the core zone). It is clear that such celebrations and rituals have been deliberately scheduled keeping in mind agricultural production and seasonal cycles and speak to the deep embedding of the site's residents with the landscape (Rajangam, 2018).

The region is home to numerous proto- and pre-historic sites, some of which are to be found within the WH boundary, while the justly famous rocks of Hampi are part of a craton belt (stable continental lithosphere). Therefore, though the cultural landscape category advocated by Hampi's IMP is useful (Thakur 2007a, b) it would not serve the purpose.

As often, the category has led to an imagination of culture as an 'unchanging tradition that has happened' rather than a culture that is recognised as dynamic, living, and adapting.



Fig. 1: Ruins of the Vijayanagara period stone bridge across River Tungabhadra with Hampi region's rocky outcrops forming a spectacular background - such popular images of the site overpower the 30-odd living settlements, fields, orchards, markets, and shrines located within the WH boundary. The latter typically do not feature in any popular pictures or promotional materials related to the site.

Photo: Krupa Rajangam



Fig. 2: Pilgrims congregate at Virupaksha Temple for the annual 9-day festival (Jatre). The protected monuments are part of religious activities which have continued for as long as the monuments have existed.

Photo: Krupa Rajangam

Impractical labelling and categorisation

Managing Hampi as a static landscape that belongs exclusively to the past (the medieval Vijayanagara period) and therefore only meant for viewing will not work and has not worked. When the Hampi World Heritage Area Management Authority (HWHAMA) was notified by Indian government authorities in 2003, its remit was only to protect a 'Group of Monuments' and not the lived landscape in a holistic, inclusive manner. In spite of repeated attempts to draw attention to the discrepancies between the reality of the site and the limited nature of HWAHAMA's mandate, little effort has been made to recognise and reconcile the differences.

Currently protected heritage as 'dead' monuments are few and far in-between in comparison with the rest of the site. However, on the current master plan, any material heritage structure has uniformly been labelled 'monument', including 'living' places or sites of worship. Such uniform labelling is impractical to manage or plan for. Detailed categorisation of the site's heritage beyond just the grand monumental, such as, cultural landscape precincts, living heritage monuments, buried remains, historic canal networks, farming fields and orchards could be introduced within the existing framework and individual guidelines prepared. Various studies also show that even the few 'dead' monuments are linked to other structures and are not isolated onto themselves. For e.g. Octagonal Pavilion is part of the living water system that feeds the Royal Enclosure (when it rains, water still drains away by itself).

There are also discrepancies between current recommendations of the WH Committee and the applicable legal framework. While the Committee has done away with the three zones, namely, core, buffer, and peripheral in favour of a core and buffer, legally on paper, these three zones remain in force at Hampi WHS. They cannot be repealed without an amendment to the HWHAMA Act, and this continues to create confusion on ground. This is further compounded as the territories of various administrative and legal entities that work within the WH boundary, at federal, regional, and local scales, do not overlap. HWHAMA was meant to be the nodal agency, a conduit for various departments to communicate with each other. However, the HWHAMA is yet to have a full-time Chairperson who is available to co-ordinate with various departments. This has hugely limited its efficiency resulting in the agency becoming a major bottleneck for site management (Rajangam, 2019, forthcoming).

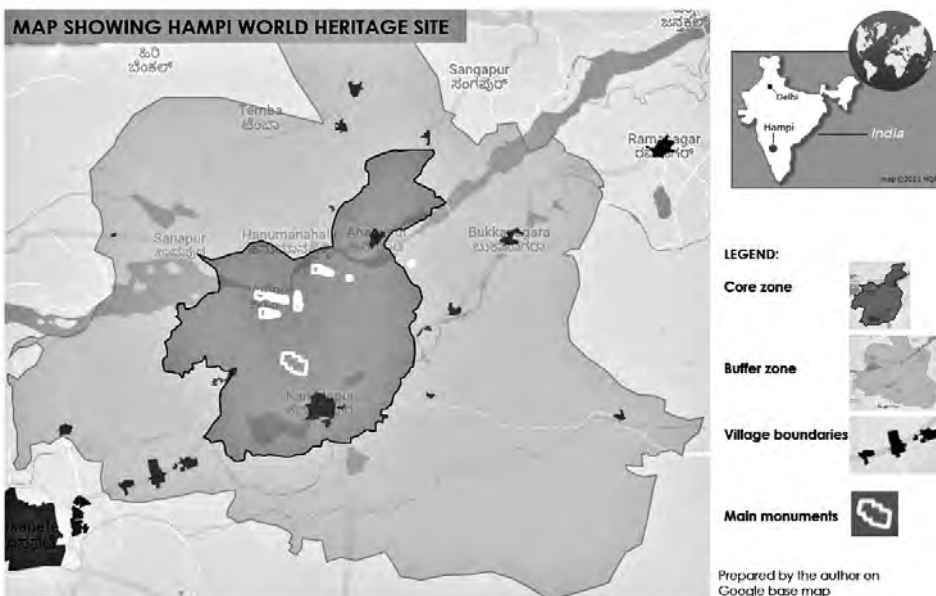


Fig. 3: Zoning of Hampi World Heritage Site.

Map: Krupa Rajangam

Impact on communities and conflicts over management of the site

Another glaring departure from the WH recommendations has been the lack of direct and meaningful community participation in decisions regarding the WH site. The WHC has recognized that areas demarcated in isolation from local or resident communities risk failure.

The complexity of the Hampi landscape demands sensitivity in handling the conservation-management and protection of the site's authenticity

and integrity. It requires an empathetic approach that allows local communities to participate in the decision making, planning and equitable benefit sharing. However, what is seen on the ground is an exclusionary model of conservation-management which has ended in spatio-temporal and material alienation of the local communities (Rajangam, 2019), leading to severe conflicts and everyday contestations around site management.



Fig. 4: Aftermath of demolitions in the village of Virupapura in March 2020.
Photo: Krupa Rajangam

HWHAMA, as the nodal agency for management of the site, is constituted as an executive agency, with no *taluk* (sub-district) or village level representative. This means that there is no one within the authority to raise issues, concerns and objections on behalf of the site's diverse resident communities. The 60,000 odd residents of the site spread across 29 villages are nowhere to be seen in the larger framework of heritage management in the Hampi region. Instead, residents of Hampi WHS constantly live under fear of evictions and displacement.

In most cases, the local communities have received unpleasant surprises, in violation of their human rights, when ad-hoc changes have been demanded on ground or draconian restrictions have been imposed. The unprecedented violent demolition of the Hampi bazaar in 2011, followed by further covert demolitions in 2012, 2014, 2015, 2016, have left many families homeless (Campbell, 2015 a and b; Rajangam, forthcoming).

Most recently, hotels, restaurants and tourist homes built in 1999-2000 on the island of Virupapura Gaddi, were demolished by the Authority in March, 2020, leaving many bereft of tourism income (The Hindu, 2020). The notification for demolition was justified on the basis that Virupapura Gaddi has been included in the 'core zone' of the Hampi Master Plan 2021 (which should have been revised by now and draft opened for suggestions) and commercial activities are not permissible. Meanwhile, local authorities have

sanctioned the construction of a forest department guest house on the island.

There has been little concern for the economic dependencies of the people of Virupapura Gaddi on the WHS. There has also not been any proactive measures taken to ensure communities benefit equitably from site development. The most recent order for demolition came just weeks before the national lockdown to control the global Covid-19 pandemic. While most households were demolished in March 1st week (see Fig. 4) one was demolished some weeks later - the day after the national lockdown commenced. The displaced communities have had a terrifying time coping with the double blow of a dwindling income from tourism because of Covid-19 and the order for demolition of their properties in the midst of a strict lockdown..

The overall management of Hampi also has seen severe conflicts. The Constitution of India envisions a decentralized governance system, according to which each village in Hampi has an elected body of members (called *Panchayat*) to govern their area. The *Panchayats* are given vast powers for management of their areas, which not only include important subjects such as health, sanitation, and education, but also give extensive regulatory powers, including permissions for building construction, running of hotels, licensing of shops and several other powers regarding tourism management and development.

However, HWHAMA has assumed supreme decision-making power in all planning aspects within the 'Local Planning Area' in direct conflict with the powers accorded to the *Panchayat*. The *Panchayats* are unable to exercise their authority to give permissions for any new constructions or repair works, make and execute plans for public works, or give any commercial licenses. Instead, all petitions are mandatorily forwarded from the *Panchayat* to the HWHAMA, where they are pending for a long time and later not responded to (Rajangam, 2019; EQUATIONS, 2020). This continuing stand-off has had severe negative impacts on the local communities, as all aspects of everyday living that are not directly linked to monument conservation have to be constantly negotiated and fought for.

The IMP prepared for Hampi also raised this conflict as a site management issue (Thakur, 2007). While the IMP was developed after consultations and endorsed by the WHC, so far, the elements of inclusive conservation that were envisaged in this plan have not been actualized. Rather, HWHAMA has come up with several plans, prepared with only tokenistic consultation. For example, in the most recent planning process in 2018, HWHAMA issued a notification calling for public comments on their proposal to revise the Hampi Local Planning Area Master Plan for the 29 villages. However, at that time, the current Master Plan

was available only in English, a language that neither the *Panchayat* members nor the local residents can understand easily. After extensive capacity building workshops by civil society organizations, the community understood the details and sent over 800 letters of objections to the current plan and proposal for a revised plan, but did not receive responses to this.

Due to the exclusionary manner in which Hampi has been managed, it has become a site of heavy litigation. More than a hundred cases have been filed in the High Court and Supreme Court, challenging various orders made by HWHAMA. This is the manifestation of the discontent among the people of Hampi about the management of this region. An inclusive and participatory approach to planning and management in Hampi is of utmost importance to preserve the Universal Outstanding Value. The communities, also being custodians of the heritage, are the lifeline of any successful management of heritage.

Recommendations

We call on the World Heritage Committee to consider the following actions:

1. Recommend to the State Party to submit the property under additional criteria in view of its complex ecosystem and human-nature interaction, important biodiversity and geological, prehistoric, cultural, mythological and ecological significance which qualify it as a lived landscape.
2. Urge the State Party to introduce detailed categorisation of Hampi's diverse heritage, such as cultural landscape precincts, living heritage monuments, buried remains, canal networks, farming (fields), farming (orchards), within the existing framework, and prepare individual guidelines.
3. Express urgent concern regarding the failure to include local communities' participation in planning and management of Hampi WHS, in line with the 5th C of the Convention;
4. Urge State Party to proactively engage with the local communities of Hampi WHS to evolve an effective conservation-management system that includes a shared understanding of the property and ensures equitable benefits to local communities.¹
5. Urge the State Party to rationalize the various boundaries under regional law (and amend the HWHAMA Act as required), for instance peripheral zone, in line with boundaries recognized by the World Heritage Committee, for ease of operation.

¹ One way to do this is to develop Individual Village Level Plans which have the participation of knowledgeable residents and these become a part of the Panchayats' planning system. For this, it is also important that capacities of Panchayats are built and there is an established two way communication between HWHAMA and the Panchayats.



Fig. 5: Protest of villagers. One of the placard reads "Down with the fallacious ways of ASI and HWHAMA". Photo: Equations

6. Urge State Party to reconcile differences between various legislative frameworks that operate within the WHS boundary including the laws for local governance in Hampi.²
7. Urge State Party to appoint a full-time chairperson for the HWHAMA.

References

- Campbell M (2015a) Hampi Bazaar Demolition I. *Economic and Political Weekly* L (25) Jun 20. Available at: <http://www.epw.in/print/reports-states/hampi-bazaar-demolitioni>. html (accessed 27 Jul 2015).
- Campbell M (2015b) Hampi Bazaar Demolition II. *Economic and Political Weekly* L (29) Jul 18. Available at: <http://www.epw.in/print/reports-states/hampi-bazaar-demolitionii>. html. (accessed 27 Jul 2015).
- EQUATIONS (2020) Parastatal Bodies in Tourism: Case Study of UNESCO Heritage Sites of Hampi and Mamallapuram.
- Rajangam K (2018) Constructing Heritage, Shaping Tourism: festivals and local heritage governance at Hampi WHS, in C.Palmer and J.Tivers (eds) *Creating Heritage for Tourism* (pp.50-63), Oxon and NY: Routledge.
- Rajangam K (2019) A bureaucracy of care in managing Hampi World Heritage Site, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, DOI: 10.1177/1469605319893532.
- Rajangam, K (forthcoming). Rethinking UNESCO World Heritage conservation management: Negotiations with everyday heritage governance at Hampi, India. Doctoral Dissertation. National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore: Manipal Academy of Higher Education.
- Reporter, S (2020, March 3). 19 resorts demolished near Hampi. Retrieved May 3, 2020, from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/karnataka/19-resorts-demolished-near-hampi/article30975490.ece>
- Thakur N (2007a) Hampi World Heritage site: Monuments, Site or Cultural Landscape? *Journal of Landscape Architecture* 4 (4): 31-37.
- Thakur N (2007b) Integrated Management Plan (IMP) for Hampi World Heritage Site, Final Plan-Draft, Jul 2007. Report, SPA, New Delhi.

² Legal mechanisms concerning protected heritage include a federal act and two state level acts whose boundaries overlap in some locations and are non-contiguous elsewhere. For instance, the protected zones around the 56 monuments under the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) guardianship are defined as concentric circles, literally offset lines set off from the monument boundary. These should be rationalised along administrative divisions, such as, survey numbers, revenue borders and so on (as far as possible) and then overlaid on the master plan map. This is because the circles drawn on paper might in reality cut through half of someone's land which is illogical from a management perspective for both the owner and HWHAMA. For e.g. currently half of Kaddirampura village is in core zone and half in buffer zone. Similarly, parts of certain properties in Kamalapura village lie in the core zone and part in the buffer zone.