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HERITAGE CONTESTATION AND CONTEXT OF RELIGION: POLITICAL SCENARIO FROM SOUTHERN ASIA

1. *The Context of Religion in Heritage*

Globalization, democratization, international and local cultural preservation initiatives, the penetration of the market economy, the commoditization of culture, and the politics of religious and ethnic identity impinge upon and shape many of the monumental religious sites in the world today. Lumbini, Borobodur, Angkor Wat, the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya, Bodh Gaya, Varanasi, and the Buddhist images at Bamiyan are some of the examples (cf. Owens 2002: 271). The concern of cultural heritage, especially religious built forms, had played an active role in the past, but attention for value, use and conservation are said to have emerged in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries from the rubrics of 'modernity' where tourism is accepted as way of life. Also, the identity crises and increasing gaps between haves and have-nots further attracted religious happenings as means for personal solace and religious architecture as symbol of adherents' identity. With the 'cultural turn' in geography

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and the parallel 'turn to place' in sociology, during the 1990s, writers began mapping social relations and heritage constructs, including some issues of contestation that have political and religious contexts and their own vested interests.

Religious beliefs and practices have shaped the local geographies through the built forms and associated rituals and performances. In course of time such symbolic forms considered as symbol of political control, identity, hegemony and social security, thus also turning to conflicts and political interference as the division and sub-divisions in the society segmented around their narrow defined goals and territorial demarcations. Bevan (2006: 7-8) notes that, "the levelling of buildings and cities has always been an inevitable part of conducting hostilities and has worsened as weaponry has become heavier and more destructive, from the slings and arrows of the past to the daisy-cutters of today". Religion and political conflicts go side-by-side in maintenance and destruction of those heritagescapes that played a symbolic role of identity in the past and still quite active in the cultural arena.

The ancient monuments and the built structure of the past have literally been invented and reinvented by many people over successive generations, each one with their own ideas and many times religious connotations that also results to a multiplicity of readings, which often compete for legitimacy, dominance and conflicts. A particular site with its perception as possessing inherent power of healing makes 'sacred' that later converges into a sacred place, and more comprehensively as 'sacredscape' that possesses religio-ritual environment, built architecture and continuity of religious happenings (see Brace, Baily and Harvey 2006: 29). Considering space as a point of cultural and religious contact and symbolism, exchange, and sometimes conflict attracted scholars to understand the reflections and reproductions of religious and social desires and anxieties. In a broad sense such sacrosanct heritage refers to the places where the spirit of nature and culture meet, and are additionally symbolised and maintained by people's attachment to rituals performed there (Singh 1997).

Sacrosanct built forms possess at least four attributes: externals (e.g. architecture), internal (e.g. images), eternal (e.g. universal message), and manifestive (e.g. adherents' believes). But the transferability from one to another mostly turns to be a painful contestation. There are, however, composed of signs, words and symbols associated with built heritage and related inherent values that may contradict to those of non-believers or the outsiders. The four basic issues for understanding representations and discursive construction of heritage include are: (i) understanding cultural significance, (ii) information on the value of heritage, (iii) conservation in response to spiritual, and (iv) cultural responsibility (Waterton, Smith and Campbell 2006: 350). In pursuing such points, the essay first addresses the contestation of heritage and religion which

is then discussed through a series of case studies. This is followed by examining issues of conservation and preservation as they apply to religious heritage.

2. Contesting Heritage and Religion

The subject of contesting heritage and related enduring role of religion could be visualized at various scales, like global, national, regional, local and bodily, and at various degrees of shared sense of religious belonging (Kong 2001: 226). Lowenthal (1998: 226) argues that "heritage, far from being fatally predetermined or God-given, is in large measure our own marvellously malleable creation". Of course, heritage is not an innate or primordial phenomenon; people created or converted it into symbolic form, and in many cases associated it with religion. The understanding of natural heritage as an expression of culture is largely a local understanding with reference to the control, possession, healing power and associated legends. This promotes to conflicts and contestation mainly due to clash among various groups claiming for the same root/control. Contestation between regional and national also emerges with reference to the values perceived regionally and projected nationally, as in the case of Vrindavana sacredscape in India. It also turns sometimes that regional/ provincial landscape challenges the national. This condition is more prevalent in case of built religious heritage landscape in Southern Asia, which is historically old and culturally and visually rich, especially in its architecture and associated symbols and legends (cf. Singh 2008: 126).

In Asia, it is an issue of open debate whether the elements cultural traditions to be reinforced should include heritage environments. Some would say that the maintenance of the intangible heritage (religion, language, literature, dance, music) is sufficient. Others, however, insists that a people's history is written on the ground, that cultural traditions are reflected in the built environments people have created for themselves, and that, because of this, heritage areas and buildings merit protection (Howe and Logan 2002: 247). Religious traditions and customs have become common through the people being habituated to them, mostly informally or in the frame of cultural traditions of the place. Statutory law, in contrast, applies to a community consisting of any members who may have the same interests but do not necessarily have common roots or heritage. In many areas of heritagescape, conflicts occur due to divergent practices in recording individual's claims.

The conception that heritage is inherently "dissonant", is open to multiple interpretations and uses as people seek to fulfil competing interests (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996). Although all heritages are contestable, the interpretation and representation of human suffering and past injustices can create significant

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dissonance or disagreement, as evident at many sacred places all over the world, especially with reference to contesting religious identities. This dissonance derives, first, from remembering uncomfortable historical truths within a process of making religious identity, and then determining how the meaning of the religious identity will be represented and communicated to the public. Increasing numbers of studies have addressed heritage sites as nodes where the competing histories – or 'dissonant heritages' (Tunbridge and Ashworth 1996) – of different social groups collide, e.g. in India the conflicts among the Hindus and Muslims. Accommodating 'dissonance' means recognising the complicated histories of our communities and their places, while simultaneously accepting parallel and competing accounts of this past.

The contradiction between symbolic systems and economic values, especially to religious buildings creates a problem when under comprehensive development plan such built forms require demolishment or change of location, like in case of Singapore where under pragmatic planning principles, and active public participation the shifting issue of buildings are solved and vested sacred meanings and values therein are re-established (Kong 2000: 348). The values that are central to religious individuals suggest the importance of self-identities rooted in more symbolic and spiritual dimensions. To realise these self-identities requires that certain built forms, namely, religious buildings, exist, following particular symbolic principles of existence. These tensions are constantly negotiated through the cultural landscape, as the state and people renegotiate the centrality of urban forms in their spiritual identities (see Kong 2000: 353).

The use of heritage becomes controversial by the context of commercialisation of spirituality (Timothy and Conover 2006: 151). In some areas of the world many cases exist where government policies influence visitors and interpretation of religious sites. A classic example is the Buddhist shrines in Myanmar that are taken over by the reigning government, which in turn reinterprets the shrines for tourists in a sanitized manner, focusing more on reinforcing political and economic claims than on presenting the Buddhist views of site sacrality (Philip and Mercer 1999). The conflicts between natural and cultural landscapes are noticeable in different area; in fact, in many cases association with a particular sect or religious group turns to promote contestation. Under the ethical and rational senses of sustainable planning the issue of contestation can be transformed into harmonious integrity (see Slaiby and Mitchell 2003: 18). Long-standing conflicts of interest between cities/ local site and state/central and between districts themselves were exacerbated by the competitive and motivated concerns of development policy, especially related to tourism and environmental preservation, in South Asia. Even though all the religious sites are part of a heritage environment, not all the heritage sites are religious sites. Nevertheless, in Oriental world the religious sites dominate the heritage scene. The built heritage

gives visual appearance a value in its own right and has the effect that the necessary interdependence of its very existence with other processes (economic, political or social) can be complex (Duncan and Duncan 2001). At a site or place the religious (cultural) symbolic value is manifested in a variety of ways.

3. Religion and Contestation of Heritage: the Scenario

Developing on these general points, in this section of the paper, several case studies from Southern Asia are used to explore the role of religion in the contestation of heritage.

Indonesia: Borobodur and Bali

The *stupa* of Borobodur, built *c.*1200BP, is the largest Buddhist monument that represents existential space, culturally defined and dating back to the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism and the control of Central Java by the Sailendra dynasty. Undoubtedly, the strong, common religion was a major force informing the building and meaning of Borobodur in relation to its landscape setting. There were also international connections with India and Sri Lanka (Taylor 2003: 51). The massive stupa of Borobodur in Java has recently undergone various transformations that have been propelled by UNESCO's designation of it as a World Heritage Site, and by Indonesians reconceptualizing their nation state after the transition from Sukarno to Suharto. Obviously, the Indonesian government's deliberate efforts at modernization have provided new frames and lives for Borobodur, while exterminating others, including religious affinity. It is now a monument to the heritage of the nation and a tourist destination at which Buddhists are prohibited from performing collective rituals (Owens 2002: 283). The "totalizing" effect of governmental "framing" of Borobodur meaning, has resulted in "eliminating other "frames," other "lives," other stories about it" as narrated by Errington (1993: 56).

The bombing of the famed international resort area of Kuta Beach and Hindu temples in Bali (Java, Indonesia) in October 2002 and the large commemoration service a year later, attended by some 2,000 in remembrance of this tragedy that killed hundreds and decimated the Balinese tourist industry was a threat to cultural-religious heritage and religious expressions of healing. Of course, it is not the high visibility of Bali as another locale vulnerable to terrorism but the question of relationship between host culture and guest aspiration for religious experience gives clues to think of "religious tourism" as distinctive travel in the 21st century! (Fischer 2003: 1-2). Without rehearsing the historical context of Hinduism that transmitted on the island

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of Bali centuries ago with the expansion of Javanese Hinduism, it is important to note that the official designation of Balinese religious identity is "Hinduism." Unfortunately, only five religions are recognized according to Indonesian law, and Bali Hinduism is not one of them. The Hindu community in Bali were not succeeded to stop building large hotel adjacent to the world famed temple of Tanah Lot, but resistance did accomplish two long-term results: (a) restrictions on the height and proximity of hotels for religious sites, and (b) the awakening of many Balinese to the fragility of their environment and opportunities to act with a sense of empowerment over their land and culture. Of course, not expressed as a popular resistance movement but more successful in effort, was the rejection of a move to declare Pura Besakih a UNESCO preservation site. In this instance, the Balinese Hindu community refused to relinquish its authority over this symbolic centre, fearing the good intentions of the World Heritage site project might impugn their jurisdiction over practices and care of Bali's greatest pilgrimage site (Fischer 2003: 6-7).

Nepal: Swayambhu

Swayambhu (Kathmanu valley, Nepal), the central point of UNESCO-designated World Heritage Monument Preservation Zone, Nepal's largest and arguably most important ancient site of Buddhist devotion, and is a place being shaped by people who have differing visions of what it is and should be. Inspired by devotion or desire to acquire merit (among many other motivations), South Asians have also long restored, improved, decorated, remodelled, and rebuilt temples, including ancient ones. The hill that more or less defines the Swayambhu Monument is a site of four Buddhisms (grossly defined): Theravada, from Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand; Tibetan from Tibet and Bhutan, and local variations of Vajrayana and Mahayana. The most conspicuous, elaborate, and honored feature of this site is the Swayambhu *stupa* itself, which is the most revered place for the Kathmandu valley's Newar Buddhists (Owens 2002: 277). This is also a site of contestation having many perspectives, ranging from debates about religious meaning, to architectural symbolism, to struggles over land. In fact, Swayambhu today is the product of a long battle won by those creating it against government officials who were long opposed to it. It is also, however, a product of collaborative construction that brings differences among collaborators to light" (Owens 2002: 283). The many different parties interested in Swayambhu's fate, both within and outside the Federation, have differences of opinion about what is to be preserved and for whom. Some favour the traditional practice of religious activities (now possible on a new scale and accessible to many), and others privilege the monuments themselves to be used as heritagescape for tourism.

Afghanistan: Bamiyan

By the order (*fatwa*) of Taliban's leader Mulla Omar on 26 February 2001 took the destruction of the mammoth mountain carvings of Bamiyan and all other statues in Afghanistan. The prolonged phase of civil war and unrest in Afghanistan, since the fall of the communist government, has led to the systematic looting of ancient sites like Ali Khanum, Begram and Hadda. As repercussion of religious vandalism all traces of a glorious past have disappeared for ever (Bopearachchi 2004: 40-41). At closer scrutiny of Bamiyan destruction, the violent acts themselves and the perverse modalities of their execution present various features; four of them are important. First, unlike traditional war damage to cultural heritage, which affects the enemy's property, the demolition of the Buddhas of Bamiyan concerns heritage that belonged to pre- Islamic past of the Afghan Nation. Second, the destruction motive was not linked to a military objective, but was intentionally to eradicate any cultural heritage of religious or spiritual creativity that did not correspond to the Taliban view of religion and culture. Third, the modalities of the execution differed considerably from similar carefully planned destruction that took in the course of recent armed conflicts, comparable to the Balkan war of the 1990s and the Iraq - Iran war in the 1980s. Fourth, the episode in point is the first one of planned, deliberate destruction of cultural heritage of great importance as an act of defiance toward the United Nations (UN) and the international community (Francioni and Lenzerini 2006: 28).

Holy cities in India

There is a strong tendency in Hinduism to follow the ancestors and predecessors without any critical observation, rationality, contextuality and contemporary relevance in serving the humanity. This turns into belief systems of 'strict' faith/s, also promoting and consisting therein superstitions. This also includes addition of modern rituals, performances and side-shows that are only to promote exotic tourism taking religious happenings as major attractive events. The built architecture and environments of the temples, shrines and monasteries associated with different gods, divinities and local godlings (*loka devata*) are the major objects those suffered in maintenance of the ancient traditions, grandeur and conveying the ecospiritual messages for which once India led the whole world. Tuan (1974: 146) has rightly remarked that "While the development imperatives have taken precedence, many religious adherents in fact conceive of their religious places as sacred places that should not be destroyed, irrespective of their architectural or historical merit". In passage of time the difference between religious/ritual performances and spiritual and awakening understanding has been lost; in fact, rituals superseded the spiritual. This development process led

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the adherents believe that religious places are intrinsically sacred and possess spiritual values from where the devout Hindus charismatically get their wishes fulfilled.

In spite of the message of communal harmony and brotherhood, after the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632, Arab raided Outlying settlements in the northwest of India that marked the religiously intentioned destruction of Hindus' religious built up like temples, shrines and monasteries. From the 8th to the 15th centuries successive waves of ethnic Muslims entered the subcontinent – Arabs, Turks, Afghans, Persians, Mongols raiders came to loot the palaces, treasuries, and temples, but it was the settled merchants and other colonists who slowly spread the new religion (Knipe 1991: 64). Arabic *Qur'an*, as revealed through his messenger, the Prophet Muhammad; the only aim of Islam has been to establish a single community with a single law and the notion of an abode of Islam (*dar al-Islam*) in which religion and polity are one; a doctrine of the unity of God that has no place for iconography, let alone myths, symbols, and rituals celebrating the dynamic multiplicity of the divine.

The Mughal dynasty (1526-1707) in South Asia has tactfully and brutally tried to fulfil the dream of a *dar al-Islam* through destruction of Hindu monasteries, temples, pilgrimage sites, and iconography and transplanting there own built structure, traditions and culture. The bigoted and fanatic emperor Aurangzeb (r. 1658-1707) was a ruler by confrontation who declared Islam as the religion and constantly destroyed the Hindu temples, including the major temple at Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi. But by 1800 the Mughal empire had all but collapsed, and with it the dream of a *dar al-Islam* too.

The World Hindu Council (VHP) extends their agenda for getting under their control several disputed mosques, strongly arguing for the important mosques in the holy cities of Ayodhya, Mathura and Varanasi (Banaras). Historian Eaton (2000) clearly shows that cases of destruction of places of worship were not restricted to Muslim rulers alone. He recounts numerous instances of Hindu kings having torn down Hindu temples, in addition to Jain and Buddhist shrines. He says that these must be seen as, above all, powerful politically symbolic acts. All other Hindu sacred places too equally suffered destruction in the rule of Aurangzeb in the 17th century, with mosques built on them, like Krishna's birth temple in Mathura and the rebuilt Somnath temple on the coast of Gujarat. The neo-Hindu revivalism and awakening of Hindu identity with vested interest are getting inspiration by the VHP and making their mind to destroy those Muslim monuments built on the razed site of Hindu temples.

Ayodhya

On 6 December 1992 a mob led by Hindu fundamentalists, the right wing activist from World Hindu Congress (VHP), ultimately in their last attempt succeeded in razing the sixteenth-century Babri mosque (built by Mughal king Babur in ca 1528) in Ayodhya, which was in fact was an important temple site of lord Rama in the early twelfth-century, but converted into mosque after its demolition (Bevan 2006: 134). However, some leftist historians opine that on the basis of available evidences proving the existence of Hindu temple at this site is doubtful. A stone slab of about 5'x 2.25' recovered from the debris on 6 December 1992, records the construction of a magnificent gold-topped temple of Rama during the reign of Gahadvala emperor Govindachandra (1114-1154 CE) by King Naya Chandra and Ayush Chandra. This certainly proves the presence of a temple that was demolished to make way for a mosque. During last four hundred years there had been several attempts to remove the mosque through court, direct action, or planned attacks. In the mid 18th century Nirmohis, a local Hindu sect laid their unsuccessful claim over the Babri Mosque. But these claims led to the violent conflict of 1853-55. Again in 1885 Mahant Raghubar Das filed a suit with the Sub-judge at the district headquarters for permission to build the temple, but it was turned down, but it resulted to a battle, recording casualties of some seventy-five Muslims. The mosque was listed as a protected monument under the Indian "Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904," and courts continued to protect the mosque as an historic landmark. After India's independence in 1947 the different religions and their monuments had largely co-existed side by side, as in Bosnia. Taking the controversy of installation of Lord Rama's image inside the mosque on 22 December 1949, the administration has ordered to stop entry by any group of the people. In October 1984 the VHP tried to make the mosque-temple question a national issue through their newly form organisation for getting the Rama's birthplace liberated from the control of Muslims, and ultimately they succeeded in their mission on 6 December 1992. The Ayodhya crisis must also be seen within the climate of increased tensions between India and Pakistan over the last few decades, and the fundamentalist groups between Muslims and Hindus within India itself (see Elst 2002, 2003). Says Bevan (2006: 137), that:

"The demolition of sacral buildings has become a key proxy through which post-Partition inter-communal strife is now expressed. Ayodhya is India's Twin Towers – a ground zero from which the waves of violence are spreading to engulf thousands and potentially millions of people".

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Bodh Gaya

The Buddhist monastery and temple (Mahabodhi) at Bodh Gaya was built by the king Ashoka in ca 232 BCE and remained an active site till 1192 CE when Muslim invaders destroyed it. Some of the railings are dated to 150 BCE. During the rule of Mughal King Akbar, from 1590, the temple was under the control of a Shaiva Hindu priest who managed to set Shiva Linga in the inner sanctum, which after passage of time turned into religious conflicts. Even in the British regime attempts were made to resolve the conflicts between Hindus and Buddhists for possession and ownership. In 1872 under the patronage of Burmese king the temple was renovated and re-built. After independence, since 1949 through an Act both Hindus and Buddhists got authority for worship and joint control. But Buddhist have not accepted this arrangement, thus a continuous movement to liberate this temple from the interference of Hindus is noticed, including peaceful march of around half-million Buddhists from all parts of the world in October 1992 and November 1995. This contestation is still in continuance. The main temple too is a sacred site and it has been enlisted by UNESCO in its World Heritage list in 2006. Every year, at this site one can witness magnificent 'Prayer Festivals' attended by thousands of devotees. Here, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Karmapa as well as a number of other outstanding Buddhist Teachers sit from the early hours of the morning till noon, and again from mid-afternoon till dusk, for a number of days in continuity, chanting or delivering discourses. During the Shaiva Hindu control it has been recorded that some of the original statues of Lord Buddha have been defiled and stolen from the Mahabodhi temple, idols of some of the Hindu Gods have been smuggled inside the temple including Shiv linga to dilute and defame Buddhism, and all sorts of Hindu rituals and rites are being followed inside Mahabodhi temple to defame and bring impurity in Buddhism. In the present century, the Buddhists are peacefully raising their voice to get their possession nationally and internationally.

Sarnath

Sarnath and its archaeological site is considered as special sacred place the Buddhist adherents where the Buddha gave his first sermons, "Turning the Wheel of Law", in 529BCE, that is how this is one of the most venerated and compulsory places of pilgrimage. However a special fee of Rs 100 (or US $ 2) is changed for visitors in the archaeological site. Moreover, the pilgrims are not allowed to perform their rituals like lightening the candles and incense in the nearby environs since 2005. To a great surprise that no one neither complains against it, nor support the Buddhists those agitating against such charges and rules. This decision and control

by the Archaeological Survey of India has persuades conflicts and humiliation to the Buddhists. In fact, the trend to charge an entrance fee to Buddhist sites began in South-East Asia and it was only after India's immediate neighbour Sri Lanka made it compulsory for devotees to pay an entrance fee that India too followed suite. But the Buddhists feel that such charges are against the basic ethics and philosophy of "peace, justice and equality among all beings" that the Buddha gave to this world. On the name of secular policy the government of India has threatened the emotion and cultural traditions of a group. While the Constitution of India (Article 25-28 of the Fundamental Rights), as well as the Declaration of Human Rights, specifies that adherents of all religions have the freedom to worship unconditionally without any restrictions whatsoever. There is an urgent need the Government of India should review its Archaeological Laws and make suitable changes in respect to its sacred sites, especially the Buddhist. For this they can used the guidelines under UNESCO World Heritage Site that refers to 'cultural heritage', 'cultural landscape' and 'intangible resources' – all these recommend for continuity of traditions and performances that evolved in the historical past. The case of Mahabodhi temple at Bodh Gaya is an example that promotes cultural integrity and honour to the Buddhists. All one can see at Sarnath are busloads of tourists being given a guided tour. At most they may spend an hour or two chanting on the name of religion, however lacking the spiritual experiences while setting themselves in the serene and sacred environment. Sarnath has been deprived of its spiritual relevance by a very short-sighted Governmental Administrative System through their political vision. On 9 October 2007, a petition and movement already started that mentions: "We demand that the Government reconsider its total dominance on the site and share administration by way of creating a Managing Committee comprising of Indian Buddhists as well offering the Buddhists pilgrims from all over the world the liberty to perform their rituals over a period of days or weeks and to stop charging an entrance fee".

Varanasi

The temple of the patron deity and the oldest temple, i.e. Vishveshvara (also called Vishvanatha) in Varanasi, was first built in *ca*. 490 CE, which was destroyed by Qutub-ud-din Aibak the military governor of Ghazani empire in 1194. Later at this deserted site Razia Sultana (1236-1240) had built a mosque. At different site in the nearby it was again built in *ca*. 1585 under the patronage of Todar Mal. Demolishment of the famous temple of Vishvanatha and replacing it by a mosque in 1669 by the order of Mughal king Aurangzeb becomes a subject of constant conflict between Hindus and Muslims. Aurangzeb did not just build an "isolated" mosque on "a" destroyed temple.

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He ordered all temples to be destroyed, among them the Kashi Vishvanatha, one of the most sacred places of Hinduism, and had mosques built on a number of cleared temple sites. Until today, the old Kashi Vishvanatha temple wall is visible as a part of the walls of the Gyanvapi (Jnanavapi) mosque which Aurangzeb had built at the site after demolishing the temple. However, part of the back portion was left as a warning and an insult to Hindu feelings. Panikkar (1994: 73) offers a more political variation on the theme that the Kashi Vishyanath temple was destroyed to punish the temple priests for breaking purely secular laws: "the destruction of the temple at Banaras also had political motives. It appears that a nexus between the *sufi* (Islamic mystics) rebels and the *pandits* (Hindu priests) of the temple existed and it was primarily to smash this nexus that Aurangzeb ordered action against the temple". Unfortunately, the eminent historian quotes no source for this strange allegation, but it indirectly further help politicians to play the malicious role of promoting conflicts between the two religious groups.

A Muslim terrorist group has blasted twin bomb in the compound of Sankatmochan ('Monkey-God'/ Hanuman) temple, the second most important temples of veneration, on 7th March 2006 resulting to 21 casualties. It was carefully planned to provoke the devotees and the devout, rationalists and others alike. By the next morning, residents of the city – Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians – demonstrated peaceful outrage against the acts of terror. And also, Burka-clad Women, Muslim traders and Muslim clergy were not only visible in their protest and grief but could also be seen offering prayers at the temple. This helped to re-establish and maintain the cultural harmony and brotherhood in the society.

The Old City and Riverfront Heritage of Varanasi underway, since 2001, to get enlisting in the World Heritage site is facing problem of contesting consensus among Hindus and Muslims.

Champaner-Pavagarh

Champaner-Pavagarh (a World Heritage Site, Unesco), like other heritage sites in India, is both an historic and ethnographic landscape. It exhibits both the palimpsest of landscape layers inscribed over time and the juxtaposition of Hindu and Islam traditions in architecture and city planning (see Sinha 2004). Both Hindu and Islamic cultures exploited the visual potentials of the topography. The sense of harmonic relationship between Hindu (like Kalika goddess) and Muslim (like Jami and Shehri mosques) co-exists in maintenance of this heritagescape, which exists facing each other, but this may be questionable in future. The concept of cultural landscape as a heritage resource is a recent development on the line of old idea of historic

conservation and certainly did not guide monument-centric colonial efforts at restoration (Sinha and Harkness 2006: 97). On this line the Yamuna riverfront around the Taj Mahal (enlisted in Unesco WHL) is suggested as 'cultural heritage landscape. This also raises the issue of suspicion of tensions between Hindus and Muslims at some places. Defining heritage territory under the strict control of heritage law will help avoiding conflicts and contestation together with active public participation.

4. *Heritage conservation, preservation and Religion*

In warfare, historical and religious monuments are often attacked to dispirit the enemy. As in Afghanistan under Taliban regime, it is difficult to prevent great losses when destructive forces have grown as strong (Krieken-Pieters 2004: 156). As long as conservative and Islamic fundamentalist party is in rule, like Taliban in Afghanistan, there is no hope for security and conservation of cultural heritage. Through mass awakening and education religion to be accepted as the binding force and integrating process for harmony and peace among the people of various groups. It is obviously noted that the powerful groups often promote 'sectarian claims upon the past' for their own ends and keeping upward identity (Landzelius 2003: 208). Many heritage movements and plans are designed by local authorities to suit place-promotion strategies and marketing for tourism, pilgrimages and investment. Perhaps inevitably, they often sanitise local histories, commonly focusing on their controversial, uncomfortable or mundane aspects but celebrating their notable, distinctive elements instead. The cultural heritage, like other forms of landscape, is a subject of instability and transformation with respect to historical and cultural representations. Representation is a subject of people's engagement to it, re-working for it, maintaining it, continuing it and also contesting to appropriate it, commonly using religion as tool. Oral history is one of the commonly used approaches for maintaining continuity (e.g. case of Devon; cf. Riley and Harvey 2005).

Public interest anthropology offers a valuable approach, promising to provide ground necessary for constructive dialogue between the varied stakeholders and for ameliorating social inequalities at the heritage sites. A situation in which outsiders have eminence in heritage productions and imagery, also sometimes turns into contestation (cf. Adams 2005a: 435-436). For example, the politics of power dynamics embedded in the genesis of tourism imagery in the Eastern Indonesian island of Alor is mostly due to competing images of Alorese people sculpted by both insiders and outsiders. The process encourages conflicts at different levels in different degrees. In fact, tourist images emerge and evolve as hybrid forms by fusion of historical, local and visitor imagery (Adams 2004a, 2004b). Contradiction between local perception

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and involvement of outsiders superseding the local turns to further conflicts as in case of Toraja village of Kété Késu on the Island of Sulawesi, Indonesia, which is now inscribed in the WHL of Unesco as 'living cultural landscape/ heritagescape' (Adams 2003, 2005b, 2005c). Of course the country, Indonesia, is dominated by Islam; Toraja village is mostly a Christian community that maintains its ethnic identity by continuance and maintenance of their ancestral houses (*tongkonan*).

One of the major objectives to visit heritage sites is the development of identity that refers to spiritual or religious enlightenment. As many of the tourist industry's resources are based on natural and built heritage, religious heritage is an important object for retrospection (Olsen and Timothy 2002). Tourism attracts international visitors and consequent economic transactions. The Torajans (Indonesia) are bound to re-examine and remodelling their rituals and history with an aim to please outsider tourists by making them more attractive at the cost of sometimes divestment of the meaning, exposure and emotive power of culture (Adams 1999: 259-260).

With the growing sense of tourism and wish to see culture in the mirror of history and tradition, heritage resource management becomes a focal issue in both the ways: protection and maintenance of sacred sites, and survival and continuity of pilgrimage ceremonies. Fostering a rediscovery of forgotten (or, about so) common cultural heritage and practices at sacred places that centred on reverence to and harmony with the Earth as source and sustainer of life, the conservation and preservation of such holy sites would put a strong step in this direction (Singh 2006: 234). There are examples of such grand Hindu pilgrimages at regional level, like Sabarimalai in Kerala (South India), in which Christians and even Muslims participate (Sekar 1992). Such places are the nexus of cultural integrity, but also several times encourage contestation and conflicts under the patronage of vested interests of politicians following the notorious game of 'divide and rule'. Certainly we need a very comprehensive vision of cultural landscape that integrates the harmony of ethical-religious values and intangible cultural heritage.

Under the provisions of the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict of 14 May 1954, and of other relevant international instruments, it is prohibited: (a) to commit any acts of hostility directed against the historic monuments, works of art or places of worship which constitute the cultural or spiritual heritage of peoples; (b) to use such objects in support of the military effort; (c) to make such objects the object of reprisals (Francioni and Lenzerini 2006: 35-36). The deliberate and systematic destruction of cultural properties of pre-Islamic Afghanistan and, more particularly, of the Bamiyan Buddhas, in so far as this heritage constituted a representation of both a religious belief and the cultural

identity of a people, could finally be envisaged as a violation of certain human rights to practice and obtain respect of one's own religion (Francioni and Lenzerini 2006: 38). Years of civil war, bombardment, looting, neglect, and, most recently, iconoclastic hysteria, have reduced that once proud museum (*National Museum at Kabul*) to a nearly empty shell. And now, reportedly, above its front door, frayed and flapping in the wind, hangs a banner that reads: "A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive" (Cuno 2006: 41). Reconstruction on the rubble of destruction is an option and subsequent listing as a world heritage site would then become a possibility if, and only if, the world heritage committee would make an exception to its criterion of authenticity, as it did in 1980 by listing the historic city of Warsaw. In this event the enormous increase in name recognition, caused by the publicity, could then even result in an increase in tourism and some palpable if unintended benefits result from the destruction (Ashworth and Aa 2002, 455).

Unfortunately, there is no way to guarantee that tragedies like Bamiyan will not happen in the future. Rogue governments that refuse to heed the human voice of reason and restraint will no doubt be part of our future just as they have been of the past. But there are some things that could be done to lessen their likelihood in the future, like active UN-sponsored inter-religious dialogue and attention to spirituality, promoting education for universal values, and more prominence to the UNESCO Convention and increased funding to preserve and maintain these sites for the sake of future generations of humanity (Bryant 2002/03: 61-62).

The conservation of heritage in India is regulated by the constitution referring the fundamental rights to freedom of religion and culture. The presence of historic buildings in the modern world is fraught with danger. They are the national pride, but also are sites of contestation, especially religious that also turns to inter-community violence. Much of the recent public debate associated with heritage has accompanied the escalation of both nationalist and regionalist movements, though claims on the past in the domains of museum representation, consumption, and cultural performance are also related to the liberalization of the political economy (Hancock 2002: 706). Violence and suffering are attractive characteristics of tourism products and heritage can only reflect humanity's sad history of continuous conflict, oppression and general unpleasantness (Ashworth and Hartmann 2005).

In India, there has been criticism of the roles that urban development and mass media have played in erasing the material relics of the past, as well as in diminishing residents' knowledge of and attachments to those relics. At the same time, the greater value accorded tourism as an avenue for development reflects a perception that the marketing of heritage offers a means of preserving and enhancing the value and

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visibility of the endangered residues of the past (Hancock 2002: 709). In fact, the religious consciousness has left far behind the awakening of the cultural heritage and heritage buildings. Religious buildings form a large part of the cultural heritage in South Asia, but little consciousness of historical value (Feilden 1993: 1).

In South Asia the conservation movement has not yet integrated the religious ethos of Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs as well as Muslims and this is a critical area that needs study by persons of their own culture, who understand the ethics and practice of conservation and projection of universal values (Feilden 1993: 1). Cultural heritage in Asian cities is shaped by philosophies and religious systems that emphasize the intangible rather than the tangible, and the built environment is often not integral to memories of the past. Asian cities are treasure of intangible heritages by an abundance of myths, legends, and festivities and rituals associated with sacred places. Without taking these and religious rites into account together, even the best-preserved temple will be merely an empty shell and of little significance to local people (Howe and Logan 2002: 248). Except Japan, most of the Asian cities have inadequate legislation and planning control over heritagescapes. This further provides a loophole for the people of vested interest in misusing heritage sites and properties. In addition with lack of understanding the universal importance of heritagescapes and their resource value in promoting heritage tourism, increasing pace of individualism and consumerism, the situation turned to be horrifying by constant threat and destruction to such sites.

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Abstract

Rana P.B. Singh

HERITAGE CONTESTATION AND CONTEXT OF RELIGION:
POLITICAL SCENARIO FROM SOUTHERN ASIA

Heritage is a cultural identity to be reflected in the purview of individual, unique and multiple layers of pluralism, especially with respect to religion, at least in Oriental cultures that maintained their traditions and continuity together with examples of contestation, destruction and also sometimes harmonious co-existence. In the span of time the layering of various cultures put their marks, which in the sequence of time turn to be the issue of conflicts due to claims and controls by the different groups. As a consequence there resulted issues of representation, belongingness, control and power, dissonance and contestation. Despite all theoretic constructs and human concerns for peace and harmony the issue of dissonance dominates, especially with

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reference to ethnicities and religion. The religious built environments are the pitiful sufferers in such happenings of turmoil recorded every parts of the world. In South Asia the Muslim invasion in medieval period (15th to 18th centuries) had been the major force and process for destruction and superimposing Islamic structure, like in case of major sacred cities of Hindus in north India. In the areas of old culture one finds heritagescapes that are subject to 'ill construction and jumbled space' where 'several sites appear incompatibly'. The conflicts between secularist democracy and democratic religiosity are the common phenomena in South Asian region. So on, conflicts between archaeological sites or monuments and lived cultural heritage. It may be accepted rationally that if the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, are ready not to heap defeat and humiliation with an aim to re-establish the history of the medieval times, the issues can be resolved amicably. This essay reviews the emerging literature dealing with the enduring role and context of religion in the issue of contesting heritage (mostly cultural). Emphasis is further laid on the contextual constructs of analysis, examples from different parts of Southern Asia, and finally role of religion in policies, mitigation and management of contesting heritage.

Key words: contesting heritage, heritagescape, Hindus, Muslims, intangible heritage, religious conflict, sacred place, symbolic value.

Резиме

Рана П. Б. Синг

ОСПОРАВАЊЕ НАСЛЕЂА И ВЕРСКИ КОНТЕКСТ : ПОЛИТИЧКИ СЦЕНАРИО ИЗ ЈУЖНЕ АЗИЈЕ

Наслеђе представља културни идентитет који се одсликава у области посебног, јединственог и вишеслојног плурализма, нарочито када је реч о религији, барем када је реч о оријенталним културама које држе до својих традиција и континуитета упоредо са примерима, са једне стране, оспоравања и уништавања или, пак, понекада хармоничне коегзистенције. Током времена, бројне културе су слојевито утискивале своје трагове, који су у одређеним периодима били предмет сукобљавања зато што су различите групације имале своје захтеве или су настојале да успоставе контролу. Последице тога су се испољавале у проблемима представљања, припадања, контроле и власти, разједињености и оспоравања. Упркос свим теоријским конструкцијама и бригом људи за мир и хармонију, питања раздора и неслагања

још увек доминирају, посебно када је реч о етничкој припадности и вери. Средине утемељене на верским разликама изложене су болним патњама у бурној ускомешаности видљивој у свим деловима света. Муслиманско освајање јужне Азије током Средњег века (од 15. до 18. века) било је најважнији фактор и процес разарања и, затим, надоградње исламске структуре, као што је то било у случају великих светих хиндуистичких градова на северу Индије. Када је реч о старим културама, може се видети да је културно наслеђе смештено на „лошем простору и да је у метежу", чак и да се понекада ради о „потпуно међусобно неспојивим стварима". Сукоби између секуларистичке демократије и демократске религиозности су заједнички феномен у региону јужне Азије. А, такви су и судари између археолошких локација и споменика и садашњег културног наслеђа. Као рационалан би могао да буде прихваћен став да би, ако две заједнице, хиндуисти и муслимани, нису спремне да забораве пораз и понижење, односно жељу да се врати средњевековна историја, проблеми би онда требало да буду решавани на пријатељски начин. Овај чланак представља преглед постојеће литературе која се бави трајном улогом религије и верског контекста у питањима оспоравања наслеђа (превенствено културног). Нагласак је стављен на контекстуалне темеље анализе, на примере из различитих области јужне Азије и, коначно, на улогу религије у политици, на смиривање ситуације и на очување наслеђа које се доводи у питање.

Кључне речи: оспоравање наслеђа, слика наслеђа, Хиндуисти, Муслимани, недокучиво (или недодирљиво) наслеђе, свето место, симболична вредност.