

Heritage and the Agenda of Socio-cultural Sustainable Development: An Interpretation

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws attention to the idea of sustainable development from a cultural and social perspective. Underscoring the impact of heritage in ensuring human wellbeing it is argued that today culture is being recognized globally as one of the bastions of sustainable development. While a beginning has been made in respect of World Heritage sites where the role of the local community in the conservation and management of the heritage resource is receiving due attention, this paper by drawing attention towards the usually neglected regional and local level heritage, asserts that this rather sidelined heritage corpus also needs to be recognized as a cultural asset so that it that can play a meaningful role in enhancing the quality of life of its own community. By examining the case of historic water architecture of Haryana it is demonstrated how this rather neglected corpus of local and regional level cultural resource can be managed by the community that owns it. A community centric as opposed to the long held monument centric approach to conservation is advocated that will abet both financial augmentation of the community while keeping social traditions intact thereby achieving cultural and social sustainability.

KEYWORDS: *Community Participation; Cultural Sustainability; Cultural Ecosystem; Cultural Capital; Heritage; Social Sustainability*

Introduction

The contemporary times demand that the notion of development rather than subscribing exclusively to the ideal of economic growth, be in a state of constant evolution to effectively meet the challenges posed by the times we live in. Indeed as the globe embraces the idea of sustainability in its varied manifestations, it is imperative that development addresses issues that go beyond the mammon to encompass in an integrated manner a wide spectrum of social and cultural domains to improve human prospects. For development to be sustainable it must be a '(...) continuing process of mediation among social, economic, and environmental needs which results in positive socio economic change that does not undermine the ecological and social systems upon which communities and society are dependent' (Carley & Christie, 1993:48). The many interpretations of sustainable development are a testimony to the fact that neither the term sustainable nor the word development lend themselves to pithy definitions (Barbier, 1987; Simon, 1989). It is this very ambiguity that permits the notion be considered from varying perspectives while underscoring human wellbeing.

While UNCED's Agenda 21 of 1992 stipulated that human development can no longer be simply measured in economic terms and must be linked to environmental quality thereby establishing the principle of sustainable development, it is only recently that culture is beginning to be acknowledged as a role player in development processes¹. Throsby, in drawing an analogy between environmental diversity and cultural diversity asserts that just as it is imperative to protect our ecosystems to be sustainable, so is it necessary to safeguard mankind's cultural heritage including built heritage as 'Cultural Ecosystems' that support and maintain cultural life (Throsby, 1995; 2001)². This marks a departure from the previously held worldview in the not too distant past that development and cultural heritage conservation were incompatible rather the latter was largely seen as not having economic worth and therefore regarded as being anti-development³.

This Paper argues that the social impact of cultural heritage in ensuring human wellbeing cannot be undermined thereby making it an important determinant of sustainable development. Indeed a culturally sustainable development approach will ensure that mankind's beliefs, rituals, arts and customary practices are also safeguarded with the same spirit with which the environment with its diverse stock of natural resources and ecosystems is being protected. While a beginning has been made in respect of heritage of universal significance, implying sites with UNESCO's World Heritage status, this paper by drawing attention towards the usually neglected regional and local level heritage, asserts that this rather sidelined heritage corpus also needs to be recognised as a cultural asset so that it that can play a meaningful role in enhancing the quality of life of the community⁴. To make its point the paper examines the regional and local architectural expression by way of historic water architecture, a subject not simply of scholarly neglect but also largely forgotten by the community that raised it to fulfill its water needs. Further, the corpus as evolved in the state of Haryana forms the subject of attention rather than states notably Gujarat and Rajasthan whose water tradition is well known. The water architecture heritage of Haryana forms part of the local communities' cultural expression and is manifested as a range of built-form types from the modest well to the elaborate water palace. The entire corpus is regarded as Throsby's 'Cultural Ecosystem' construct thereby arguing for its safeguarding particularly in light of the fact that it is extremely vulnerable on account of the threat of neglect and even complete disappearance. Such a scenario only reinforces the need to reestablish the link between heritage and the community making the relationship a driving force of the agenda for development that is culturally and socially sustainable.

Context

Perhaps the most ardent assertion of the interconnectedness between development and culture has come from Amartya Sen, who has argued that the two are linked in several ways. Culture by its very nature defies ordering, and it is its

intangible and experiential dimension that imparts development processes with richness and variety (Sen, 2001). Sen's views have been endorsed globally with the United Nations adopting a resolution in 2010 that stated that cultural diversity was a vehicle for sustainable development as 'culture is a source of enrichment and an important contributor to the sustainable development of local communities, peoples and nations, empowering them to play an active and unique role in development initiatives'⁵. The idea that the community has a stake in development processes certainly pre-dates the United Nations' resolution with sustainable development being regarded as being attainable only through '(...) a broad participatory process involving all layers of societies, both in the public and private sectors. International institutions, including the United Nations system, can contribute to the process through setting standards and providing a framework for collaborative endeavors (Kunugi, 1992:112). It is with the objective of meeting its international obligation that UNESCO's World Heritage Centre is focussing on enhanced participation of local communities in the conservation, management and presentation of World Heritage sites and identification of opportunities for their sustainable social and economic development (Sullivan, 2004). Further, global impetus has come via the ICOMOS General Assembly that adopted a resolution in 2011 on 'Heritage as a driver of development'⁶. Furthermore, the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, of Rio+20, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Habitat that was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 2012, acknowledged the role that culture can play as a measure of progress. It went on to call for not only reviewing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (adopted in the year 2000), where culture and heritage did not find a place but also underscored the need for developing new objectives called Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that would address cultural issues⁷. In fact, UNESCO is working towards ensuring that culture notably World Heritage be incorporated into the SDGs so that heritage finds its rightful place in all future policies at global and national levels (Boccardi, 2012)⁸. This will certainly go a long way in ensuring that heritage issues will not be put on the back burner when setting the agenda for development.

Traditionally there has existed a disconnect between conservation and social development. It has been argued that conventionally heritage conservation has tended to focus on conservation for its own sake with the social impact of conservation being somewhat relegated to the background through the foregrounding of the technological and philosophical underpinnings (Calame & Sechler, 2004). This seems ironical considering the fact that both disciplines, namely heritage conservation and social development, have common interests championing the cause of sustainability, appropriate technologies and imparting local training and skills. Low asserts 'Social Sustainability' to be a subset of cultural sustainability defining it as the 'maintenance and preservation of social relations and meanings that reinforce cultural systems. Specifically, it refers to maintaining and enhancing

the diverse histories, values and relationships of contemporary populations' (Low, 2001:48)⁹. This argument further bolsters the importance of bridging the schism between heritage conservation and social development. While international bodies notably UNESCO establish a framework for community participation with respect to world heritage, it is worthwhile to underscore the fact that the countless, little remembered, disused and even abused historic structures that exist in countries around the world including India also count to make the goal of sustainable development a reality. Indeed, it is for each country to draw both on the global agenda, the universal, as well as on the ground reality of their situation, the regional and the local, to establish their own framework for sustainable development that is both culturally and socially responsive.

Haryana's historic water architecture: taking stock of a 'Cultural Ecosystem'

The state of Haryana has historically served as a corridor for the arrival of diverse foreign influences into the Subcontinent besides being witness to several important battles in history fought on its soil¹⁰. The arrival of a succession of invaders over the centuries has left its mark on the landscape through a wide range of built form types including structures for water. Indeed, the geography of the northwestern part of the Subcontinent has abetted the patronage of water architecture since ancient times. The scarcity of a network of water sources in the Satluj-Yamuna Doab spurred human action into making interventions in the landscape to create manmade structures for holding water (Chaudhri, 2012). Even as the Subcontinent's traditionally arid and semi arid regions notably Rajasthan and Gujarat have demonstrated a rich water architecture tradition, it would not be incorrect to assert that a similar tradition also existed in the region that lay between two Himalayan river systems, namely Satluj and Yamuna¹¹. Haryana, that lies in the Satluj-Yamuna Doab, has a tradition of water architecture that can be traced to the pre-Muslim era as a number of surviving structures testify¹². The tradition was bolstered during the years of Muslim, notably Mughal, rule that yielded patronage, imperial, sub-imperial and plebeian, for the construction of water structures as is evident from the several surviving remains that dot the landscape of the region. Following colonisation, as engineered solutions of water management based on metropolitan ideas gradually replaced the indigenous systems, communities in the desire to be modern embraced technology turning their back on the indigenous tradition. Today, a culturally sustainable approach to development will underscore the role played by traditional water structures not only as a utilitarian entity but also embodying an abstract dimension transcending from catering to human consumption to being a cultural asset by way of enhancing religious, spiritual and recreational pursuits. The Paper therefore eschews both the Wittfogelian argument of examining water architecture as an instrument of power assertion as well as presenting a comprehensive architectural overview and analysis of water

structures, rather it concerns itself with considering the corpus as a Throsby-ian 'Cultural Ecosystem' in need of safeguarding by integrating it in the community development framework¹³.

Among the human interventions to hold water, the most prominent ones to be found across Haryana include the following in alphabetical order: Bandh (Dam); Baoli (Stepwell); Jal Mahal (Water Palace); Kuan (Well); Nahr (Canal) and Talao/Kund/Sarovar (Pond/Tank/Reservoir) (Jain & Dandona, 2012)¹⁴. Built by royalty, elite and the proletariat, for reasons both mundane and religious, these are found across the state. In terms of historicity, some structures cannot be dated with certainty, while some have over times acquired a legendary status on account of their association with Hindu epics particularly the Mahabharata. Among those that can be dated, one of the oldest includes a stone Bandh (Dam) at Anangpur village, in Faridabad district, built in the 11th century CE by the pre-Muslim Tomar rulers of the region. Not far from it lies a large, curvilinear, stone masonry Kund (reservoir) called Suraj Kund attributed to the Tomar ruler, Surajpal, and built in the 10th century CE to hold the monsoon runoff from the surrounding terrain. However most surviving water structures date from the post Muslim era with patrons commissioning them for religious and utilitarian purposes.

Tanks and reservoirs outnumber other built form types and are found in most districts of the state. Of this group of historic structures, a majority were built out of religious fervour with Kurukshetra's Sannihit Sarovar and Brahma Sarovar attracting pilgrims from all over the country for Snan (ritual bathing) on certain auspicious days in the Hindu almanac. Others like Charkhi Dadri's Shyameshwar Tank, Phalgu Tirth in Kaithal, Jind's Rani Talab and Pandu Pindara's ghats and temple complex, to name some, were also built as part of temple precincts and have religious sanctity at either regional or local level. An ensemble of tanks in Narnaul including Shobha Sarovar, Anup Talao, Bada Talao and Chhota Talao were commissioned to provide water for the community, while those built by the Nawab of Loharu in Loharu and Rani ki Chattri complex in Ballabhgarh also doubled as leisure places for royalty and the elite. The most outstanding complex built for leisure is Narnaul's Jal Mahal (Water Palace), a 16th century CE pleasure palace standing in the middle of a tank and accessed by a causeway. Outcome of sub-imperial patronage, it is the sole representative of its built-form type in the state thus imparting it greater architectural as well as historical value¹⁵. The second most commonly found historic built form type includes Kuan (well) and Baoli (step well). While wells continue to be a source of water in rural Haryana even today, there are a few that call for attention on account of their architectural merit. Meham in Rohtak has two wells namely Kasaiyon Wala Kuan and Pitroo Wala Kuan, both form part of a larger spatial ensemble. The former part of a group including a tank, steps and Chattris, its name testifying its association with the Kasai (butcher) community and permits one to suggest that perhaps it was built by them, while the latter patronised

by a Hindu merchant forms part of a reservoir, Ghats, and temples. Baolis, an architecturally elaborate form of the well, are also found in some districts notably Gurgaon, Rohtak and Narnaul in Mahendragarh and have been built as an outcome of imperial and elite patronage. They go beyond the function of providing a water source to spatially abetting social interaction via series of apartments and vestibules and interconnecting arcades set at levels that traditionally offered respite from the summer heat of the region.

The engagement of the community with water manifested tangibly via architecture imparts the entire built corpus cultural value. Indeed borrowing on Throsby's six characteristics that define cultural value of a heritage resource, the historic water architecture of Haryana has aesthetic-spiritual/religious-social-historic-symbolic-authenticity values, thus constituting what Throsby calls 'Cultural Capital' namely an entity that has cultural as well as economic value (Throsby, 2001). Having taken stock of the surviving corpus of historic water architecture, it is pertinent that questions be raised as to how this 'Cultural Capital' can contribute to the wellbeing of the community to achieve culturally and socially sustainable development.

Towards achieving culturally and socially sustainable development

In the context of Haryana's historic water structures, it is imperative that first and foremost the physicality of the heritage resource be kept intact. Sadly, the collective worth of the state's entire corpus is highly undermined with only a few structures accorded protection by the state be it the Central Government via Archaeological Survey of India as in the case of Narnaul's Jal Mahal, Suraj Kund and two stepwells at Gurgaon and Rohtak; or the state government through its Directorate of Archaeology and Museums that looks after a 18th century CE Baoli in Kaithal and Narnaul's Shobha Sarovar as well as the 16th century CE Takht Baoli of Mirza Ali Jaan¹⁶. A majority of structures remain unprotected making them highly vulnerable to insensitive repair, inappropriate readaptation, misuse, vandalism and in the worst case scenario demolition thus alineating the community with its history. While appropriate conservation interventions taking recourse to both technology and philosophy will certainly ensure that the resource is conserved physically with its historicity intact, it is equally vital that the resource's contemporary importance to the community is also addressed. Indeed it is not only the past-ness of the past but also its now-ness in terms of the here and the now that merit recognition.

As has already been articulated in the Paper, conservation interventions for the sake of conservation will ensure physical integrity of the heritage resource but may not be able to forge a meaningful relationship with the community. A community centric as opposed to the long held monument centric approach to conservation takes conservation beyond the domain of the professional to make it a subject of

concern for all. Since it is the community that imparts vitality to the heritage and prevents it from turning into a museum-ised relic, the conservation of historic structures, in this case wells, stepwells or tanks will have to provide for a participatory approach to allow the historic water architecture to reclaim its space as the settlement hub where the community can once again engage with the cultural resource. Often the community's stake in its regional and local heritage may not be based so much on the tangible economic value but on the more intangible historical, spiritual, ritualistic and customary values, namely cultural value. An effective community based conservation intervention will address both the tangible and abstract aspects through an approach that will develop the means that permit financial augmentation of the community while keeping social traditions intact.

Contrary to popular perception, some simple, implementable grass root initiatives aimed at empowering the community to appreciate and support the conservation of their heritage have been known to be successful (Siravo, 2001)¹⁷. The starting point is probably building awareness and sensitization towards the cultural resource. Targetting children and youth in particular, can yield results owing to their zeal for knowledge and curiosity about their past coupled with the desire to know and share. For example a culturally informed visit of children from the local school to an old baoli, in the vicinity of their village or town can be a very enriching experience. Likewise, organising an informal conversation session by drawing in the senior most village residents to narrate their life time experience of the settlement's historic tank or well will allow the younger generation to learn hands down about their local history. Further, the community also needs to be engaged in the heritage conservation process through a hands-on participatory involvement in tasks that do not call for specialised skills like regular site monitoring, practising preventive conservation and self-engagement with the resource. Activities like site documentation by youth of say an old well or tank through simple, non-professional means like drawing and photography that are subsequently exhibited in the village or town community space will allow the entire community to see their resource in a novel way besides also showcasing young talent. Another task of engagement could entail the desilting of the water source be it the village tank or well via Shramdaan (voluntary community labour) and see it brim with water following the rains. Indeed restoration of water into defunct water structures will not only meet the acute demand for water especially in summer but also build community confidence that they can do things on their own without having to be completely dependent on external intervention. Another aspect that warrants consideration is the manner in which public space around the heritage site is put to use. Historic water structures had traditionally been social hubs abetting community interaction. A dialogue with the users can help determine how best the space around an old well or tank can be reused. One suggested use could be that the space be regarded as a women's congregational space considering how the need for

this social group to interact is usually ignored. Such usage will also subscribe to tradition where wells were sites where women not only fetched water but also stayed on to gossip, share their thoughts and even seek advice on problems, besides indulging in the more mundane acts of washing clothes, bathing children and the like.

In terms of supporting financial augmentation of the community, the resource may not always become a tool for new employment generation but can certainly provide a link to the existing opportunities for work. Two tourism initiatives that lend themselves appropriately to Haryana's historic water architecture can be recommended here, namely spiritual tourism and what can best be termed as Hydro-tourism. In case of the former, the state's many tanks and reservoirs particularly those centered on temple precincts could be envisioned as an integral part of potential sites of religious or spiritual tourism targetting not only the devout but also those seeking an off-beat authentic indigenous cultural experience. Indeed considering their strength in numerical terms and their association with religion, notably Hindusim, a number of religious tourism trails could be proposed across the state that offer visits to sites of regional and local significance particularly during the auspicious days of the calendar year or days of local festivities where visitors can partake of local rituals and customs like Snan (ritual bathing), Pind Daan (offering to long departed ancestors), to name a few. Extending financial assistance by facilitating the availability of micro credit can help people start small scale businesses like opening shops or stalls dealing in Prasad (divine libation) and other related religious memorabilia and rituals. Hydro-tourism, on the other hand, would involve devising heritage trails that explore hydrological interventions both natural and manmade to appreciate the role of water as a determinant of human settlements through the ages. Among the sites in Haryana, Narnaul in Mahendragarh is particularly recommended where a circuit can be designed on account of the sheer diversity of hydrological interventions from the grand Jal Mahal to the modest Chhota Talao and everything else in between. Guides to conduct the heritage walk can be drawn from within the local community by imparting basic training in communication and interpretation of the sites. Likewise, small businesses centered on offering local cuisine, traditional performing arts, indigenous art and crafts and even extending to home stays and provision of local transport, can be set up to offer an experience of local culture to the tourist, besides keeping the tradition intact. Indeed what better way to present a culture's past than via its present manifestation in the form of human resource that takes pride in its history.

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- 1 Agenda 21 while addressing the problems mankind faces today also aims to prepare it for tomorrow by building global consensus on the issue of development and environment. It seeks state commitment on a universal platform towards the implementation of policies that will ensure that the Agenda's vision is complied with. The preamble of Agenda 21 as adopted by the Plenary in Rio de Janeiro, on June 14, 1992 can be accessed at: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>
 - 2 Throsby explores an emerging domain within economics, Cultural Economics, a discipline where Economics concepts are applied to cultural issues. He proposes a fourth form of capital in Economics, namely Cultural Capital and argues that a well defined understanding of both the economic and cultural value of this capital is necessary in delineating policies for development particularly in historic precincts. For a detailed discussion on cultural capital, see, Throsby, David (1999): 'Cultural Capital', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 23, pp. 3-12 and Throsby, David (2001): *Economics and Culture*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
 - 3 For a discussion on how cultural heritage conservation impacts the economy, see, Rypkema, D. D. (2008): 'Heritage Conservation and the Local Economy' *Global Urban Development*, 4(1).
 - 4 UNESCO through its Paris based World Heritage Centre, encourages the identification, protection and conservation of cultural assets across the world that are deemed to be possessors of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) to entire mankind. UNESCO's World Heritage Convention of 1972 is an international treaty that makes it binding on the signatories to work for the protection and conservation of World Heritage Sites. For a detailed account of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre and its activities, see, <http://whc.unesco.org/en/>
 - 5 Resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on the report of the Second Committee (A/65/438) 65/166. Culture and Development - December 20, 2010.
 - 6 The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is an international, non-government organization working towards the conservation of world's monuments and sites. The ICOMOS Resolution can be accessed at: http://www.international.icomos.org/Paris2011/GA2011_Declaration_de_Paris_EN_20120109.pdf
 - 7 The Rio+20 vision as stated in the outcome document, *The Future We Want*, envisages a development format that ensures the promotion of 'an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for our planet and for present and future generations.' For a complete account of the outcome document, see, <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/futurewewant.html>
 - 8 For an account of the relationship between culture and sustainable development the following UNESCO website may be accessed: <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/culture/themes/culture-and-development/the-future-we-want-the-role-of-culture/>
 - 9 Low has been examining patterns of cultural use in the public sphere, namely urban parks and heritage sites in United States and based on the research has evolved principles of 'Social Sustainability' for these spaces. For a discussion, see, Low, S. M., Taplin, D., Scheld, S., and Fisher, T. (2002): 'Recapturing erased histories: Ethnicity, design and cultural representation - A Case Study of Independence National Park, *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research*, 19 (4), pp. 282-99.

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- 10 For a discussion on the history of Haryana, see, Mittal, S. C. (1986): *Haryana: A Historical Perspective*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers.
 - 11 For an account of the traditional water architecture of Gujarat, see, Jain-Neubauer, Jutta (1981): *The Stepwells of Gujarat: An Art Historical Perspective*, New Delhi, Abhinav Publications. For a comprehensive account of the water architecture of the entire South Asian region, see, Hegewald, Julia, A. B. (2002): *Water Architecture in South Asia: A Study of Types, Developments and Meanings*, Leiden, Brill.
 - 12 It would hardly be an exaggeration to suggest that the water architecture of Haryana has not received adequate scholarly attention. Among the earliest works on Haryana's water architecture is Professor Ranjit Singh's work published in the 1970s on the built heritage of Haryana that included Baolis. Further, Subhash Parihar wrote an account of Baolis in Haryana and Punjab states that was published as follows: Parihar, Subhash (1999): 'Baolis of Punjab and Haryana', *Marg: A Magazine of the Arts*, 51(1). A more recent effort has been made in 2010 by a visual artist, Richard Cox, who in collaboration with INTACH documented the Baolis in the state. For an account, see, Cox, Richard (2012): 'The Water Structures of Haryana: A Visual Documentation' in Jain, Shikha and Dandona, Bhawna (eds.) (2012): *Haryana Cultural Heritage Guide*, New Delhi, Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage and Aryan Books International, pp. 63-68.
 - 13 Karl Wittfogel's seminal work examined the Indian Subcontinent's dynastic rule as a 'hydraulic-bureaucratic official-state' construct where the management of irrigation works played a central role in shaping society. Even as the Wittfogelian view was later disputed by scholars, his work articulated the first general theory about the development of ancient civilizations notably Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Chinese and Indian among others with systemic organisation of work. For a discussion, see, Wittfogel, Karl (1957): *Oriental Despotism: A comparative study of total power*, Connecticut, Yale University Press.
 - 14 The Author would like to acknowledge that the data being presented is drawn from a comprehensive compilation of the cultural heritage of Haryana, *Haryana Cultural Heritage Guide*, that includes the state's built heritage including water architecture. Presented as an edited volume, this endeavour was supported by the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), Ministry of Culture, Government of India and Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).
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 - 16 Monuments in Haryana protected under the aegis of Archaeological Survey of India fall in the domain of its Chandigarh Circle. For a complete listing of protected monuments in Haryana, see, http://www.asichandigarhcircle.in/list_of_centrally_protected_monuments_of_haryana.php
 - 17 One such initiative that is relying on implementing grass root initiative is the Sundar Nursery-Humayun's Tomb-NizamuddinBasti Renewal being undertaken by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in Delhi in collaboration with a number of state agencies among others the Municipal Corporation of Delhi and Archaeological Survey of India. The initiative is holistically regarding built, natural and intangible heritage as contributors to sustainable redevelopment of the urban area. For an account, see, <http://www.nizamuddinrenewal.org>.