

Intangible and Tangible Heritage: An Examination of the Relationship in the Sri Lankan Context

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ABSTRACT

There is a strong link between the “Tangible Cultural Heritage” (TCH) and “Intangible Cultural Heritage” (ICH). The tangible is created to facilitate the intangible activities. The life spans of ICH and the resultant TCH are not the same and as a consequence one outlives the other. The investigation in reference to Sri Lankan context shows that the heritage cities or the monuments can be classified into four types according to the level of TCH and ICH. Two main types of visitors to the heritage sites can be identified; as tourists and pilgrims. A distinct pattern of visitors can be noticed in reference to the four categories of heritage sites. In addition, a relationship between the typology and the patronage of museums could be established. The understanding of the intricate connection between the TCH and ICH would help to develop policies for conservation and management of heritage cities and monuments.

Keywords: intangible heritage, pilgrims, tangible heritage, tourists

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INTRODUCTION

The cultural heritage consists of two main categories viz; the tangible and the intangible. The tangible is subdivided into movable and immovable. The movable heritage includes artifacts and objects of material culture. The monuments, sites, landscapes and historic buildings falls in to the immovable category. The cultural practices, rituals, customs, oral practices, music, languages, poetry, dance; ceremonies belong to the category of intangible heritage.

It is evident that a strong and a close relationship exists between the “Immovable Tangible Cultural Heritage” (TCH) and “Intangible Cultural Heritage” (ICH). The tangible is created to facilitate the activities of intangible. In the Indian tradition the Intangible culture is considered as the domain of Goddess “Saraswathi” while the God “Visvakarma”

was in charge of more masculine tangible culture.

“Some arts such as dancing are an intangible heritage and kept under the protection of Goddess Saraswathi. All tangible arts, painting, sculpture, crafts and architecture were under the protection of God Visvakarma. This was the Vedic based tradition that enriched South Asian art” [1].

The life spans of ICH and the resultant TCH are not the same. One may out live the other. This makes the management of heritage a complex issue. It is necessary to examine what happens to the other when one ceases to exist.

When the shrine is destroyed while the rituals are continued to practice, the approach is generally direct. A new structure representing the styles and the

technology of the latter period would be erected. The numerous religious edifices such as image houses, churches, mosques and *kovils* illustrate this situation. The ritualistic practices of the religion have not changed or abandoned with the time. But most of the structures have been replaced with the new.

On the other hand, there are situations where the cultural practices or the activities cease to continue but the structure which facilitated them exists. An adopted use may be introduced to the old building considering the economic value. If the building has a heritage value it will be protected even without a use.

It is evident that the approaches in the management of TCH and ICH are different from each other. In the case of TCH the physical conservation of the property receives the main attention. Preservation, Consolidation, Restoration, Rehabilitation are the main strategies adopted in extending the life span of TCH. The ICH is more fragile in nature and is not possible to manage as a physical entity. The sustainability of ICH depends on the

ability to transfer it to the next generation. In the case of the conservation TCH the external factors such as legislation, the State etc. can play a vital and effective role even against desires of the owners or users. But it is not applicable to ICH. Without the consent and acceptance of the community who inherit it, the external forces can hardly contribute to the continuation of a particular ICH.

Although individually TCH and ICH demand contrasting approaches for the management, the understanding of their interconnections and dependence become essential for the conservation of both. This article attempts to explain the phenomenon with reference to selected examples of Sri Lanka.

THE TYPOLOGY FOR SRI LANKAN HERITAGE SITES AND MONUMENTS

Sri Lanka has large number of heritage sites and cities. The significance of TCH and ICH of these places vary. We could see four basic categories in reference to the level of significance of TCH and ICH.

Table 1. Heritage sites/cities classified according to the level of significance of TCH and ICH.

	High level of intangible cultural heritage or Intangible activity	Low level of intangible cultural heritage or Intangible activity
Significance of TCH- High	(Category one) Kandy heritage city Sri Maha Bodhi at Anuradhapura Ruwanveliseya at Anuradhapura Rock cave image houses at Dambulla Saman Devala at Rathnapura	(Category two) Polonnaruwa heritage city Jetawana at Anuradhapura Abhayagiriya at Anuradhapura Sigiriya Ambalama buildings Galle Dutch Fort
Significance of TCH- Low	(Category three) Kataragama Sri Pada	(Category four) Kotte historic city

In the category one, the significance of both TCH and Intangible cultural activity are high. There are fairly well preserved tangible heritage as well as significant level of activities associated to the ICH exist in these sites. The TCH and ICH are closely interrelated and often the same

ICH practices which gave rise to the historic TCH are still practiced. The city of Kandy provides us the best local example for this type. The annual tooth relic procession and the year round rituals demonstrate the high level of intangible cultural activities. The 16th to 18th century

built Buddhist monasteries, palaces, shrines dedicated to gods constitute the TCH of Kandy. At Anuradhapura the sacred Bo tree of Sri Maha Bo tree and Ruwanveliseya stupa are considered as living monuments by Buddhists. Both these places are associated with strong intangible practices. In addition, Dambulla rock cut cave image houses complex, and Saman Devala (a shrine dedicated to god Saman) at Ratnapura possess both the significant physical elements and ritualistic intangible cultural activities.

In the category two, the presence of the tangible is strongly felt. But the Intangible which created it, does not exist now. Two main causes could be identified for the state. Firstly, if the tangible is in ruined state, it prevents the practice of intangible rituals or activities. The stupas of Jetwana and Abhyagiriya at Anuradhapura are not worshipped by Pilgrims while the restored Ruwanwelisaya is patronized by large numbers. The monastic complexes at Polonnaruwa also present an example for the situation.

There are other monuments which are in fairly preserved condition but the functional and socio-economic contexts have drastically changed. Thus, there is no demand to continue the original activities or the intangible component at present. The audience hall & palaces at Kandy, the *ambalama* buildings (wayside resting places) belong to this type.

The Dutch built fort at Galle provides us a variation of the category two. It possesses significant TCH. But the present intangible activities associated with them, cannot be called heritage. Similar situation could be noticed in the surviving Kandyan period heritage residential buildings and colonial built commercial and administrative buildings. The activities of these structures at the time of their erection and at present are not recognized as intangible heritage.

In the category three, the presence of strong ICH could be noticed but in the absence of significant tangible heritage. Often it could be seen that new physical developments which do not qualify to be called heritage in the sites facilitating the intangible activities. When the old dilapidated image house of a temple is replaced by a new building we could see the continuation of the rituals of ICH without the TCH. It is observed that the absence of the tangible permits different faiths (religions) to have their own beliefs and rituals at the same site. This point is clearly illustrated at Adam's Peak, which is considered as a sacred site by all the four major religious groups of the island; Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims [2].

Kataragama town is also an example for the category three. Although the tangible heritage of Kiri vehera stupa exclusively belongs to the Buddhists, the main focus is the shrine dedicated to God; a structure without significant tangible heritage or architectural value. It is worshipped by Hindus and the Buddhists. The presiding deity is Lord Murugan or Skanda for the former while the latter have localized him as God of Kataragama.

It could be seen that the old Buddhist image houses with damaged sculpture and paintings are abandoned considering not fit for the activities of worship and a new structure is erected to facilitate the ritual. Such sites also belong to the category three.

Then we have the fourth category, where both the significant TCH and ICH of the bygone era do not have substantial survival now. The importance of such places is generally limited to the academic and research activities.

VISITORS TO HERITAGE SITES AND MONUMENTS

A distinct pattern of visitors can be noticed in reference to the four categories of

heritage sites and cities as described above. Two main types of visitors to the heritage sites can be identified; as tourists and pilgrims. A Tourist is defined as a person who make a visit predominantly for

recreational or leisure purposes. A Pilgrim is described is a person who makes a visit for faith religious or faith-based purposes [3].

Table 2. Visitors classified according to the level of significance of TCH and ICH of the site.

	High level of Intangible cultural heritage or intangible activity	Low level of Intangible cultural heritage or intangible activity
Significance of TCH-High	(Category 01) Tourists Pilgrims/Devotees	(Category 02) Tourists
Significance of TCH-Low	(Category 03) Pilgrims/Devotees	(Category 04) Researches

The heritage sites and cities belonging to the category one are visited by pilgrims and the tourists. Such TCH are considered as living monuments. The physical presence of both visitor groups, the intangible activities performed by the pilgrims and the different amenities provided for the two groups makes the heritage site or city and its surrounding very active.

For the tourists the ICH activities also become an attractive performance. The annual possessions at Buddhist temples, Hindu shrines and *devalas* with traditional music and dance are good examples of this situation.

In instances the sharing of the same place by the two groups; the pilgrims and the tourists leads to inconsistencies as well. The pilgrims and the devotees consider it as a sacred space and the behavior of tourists with predominantly recreational interests are not accepted. For example at the tooth relic temple at Kandy, the tourists who are not adequately covering the body are provided with a piece of cloth to wear to visit the inner shrine area. Similarly, the males are expected to remove the upper garment before entering into a Hindu kovil.

The tangible heritage of the category two is predominantly visited by the tourists. These sites and cities are dead in terms of

intangible activity except for the service facilities operated for the tourist visitors.

The category three sites are patronized by pilgrims/ devotees. The infrastructure and facilities are developed mainly to satisfy the needs of the devotees. A conflict of interest as in category one is not noticed at these sites.

Museums play an important role in the management of tangible and intangible heritage. According to the definition by International Council of Museums (ICOM) [4].

“A museum is an institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.”

According to the above description it is clear that the museums attempt to address the needs of tourists, researchers and students but not necessarily the aspirations of the pilgrims and devotees.

The role and functioning of museums could be analyzed with reference to the categorization made above. It could be observed that the museums at heritage sites and cities of category two function well. The tourists attempt to understand

what they cannot see at site; the non-existing intangible activities of the past and the missing TCH at the museums.

The devotees and the pilgrims have their own beliefs of the site and its history. They do not see a reason to visit a museum unless transformed themselves in to the role of a tourist after the rituals. Hence museums at sites of category three receives less attention from the visitors.

At the heritage cities and sites of category one, a visit to museum does not become essential as the tourists can see the full picture of heritage including the tangible and the intangible.

We could notice the museums at Sigiriya and Polonnaruwa have high demand. The museum of the Archeological department at Anuradhapura is located near Sri Maha Bo tree and Ruwanveli stupa; area belonging to category one (where both the TCH & ICH are strong) It has lesser number of visitors. In contrast the museums at category two sites of Abhyagiri and Jetawna are better patronized.

CONCLUSION

The existence and the practice of ICH related to a monument or heritage site provide directions for the physical conservation work. For example, at Kandy there is no confusion with respect to the entry or exit points, the access ways etc. On the other hand the extinction of the intangible component of a monument or a site make not only the visitors but also the conservators to meander. The management of tangible heritage at Anuradhapura and at Polonnaruwa illustrate the issue with lack of solid base to determine the access ways, sequence of activities, etc. for the visitors. Such situations lead to prioritize the tourists' needs in the management of conservation which in turn raises the question of 'Whose values are we conserving?'

"So, in cultural heritage management, the key issue is whose culture we are presenting and why. Also fundamental to the issue in Asia, and with consequences on options for charters and conventions, is the manner in which most Asian cultures have a spiritual view of what is culturally valuable from the past; the past lives on in memory of people, of events and of places through time rather than concentrating on the material fabric which can change or be replaced" [5].

Even in an individual monument the non-existence of the intangible component makes the decision making in respect to the conservation works subjective. For example in addition to the main entrance, a side doorway could be seen in the ruined tangible heritage of Buddhist image houses including the three main shrines at Polonnaruwa viz: Thuparama, Lankatilaka and Tivanka. The arrangement is a result of the intangible religious practices where the devotee would walk around the main shrine clockwise, make offerings and exit without facing the rear to the main statue [6]. In the absence of rituals, should the side entrance of these ruined image houses be used as the exit for the visitors (tourists) or treated as an exhibit?

An adoptive use would not provide guidance for the conservation activity. It would facilitate to maintain the physical fabric of the monument but not the soul of it. Hence the conflicts between the historic building and the new activity could also be noticed in places such as at Galle fort.

A strong TCH with the absence of the original intangible component might give rise to a new activity during a latter period. The "*Watawandanawa*" (the pilgrimage circle) was a sacred activity developed by the Buddhist devotees in the early 20th century to pay homage to more than 1000

year old ruined monuments at Anuradhapura. Such activities process the ingredients to become an intangible cultural heritage and thus to give directions for the conservation of the tangible.

The above analysis illustrates the importance of understanding of the intangible cultural heritage and the intangible activities in the management and conservation of tangible heritage. It is necessary to understand the heritage sites and monuments in respect to the varying levels of surviving tangible and intangibles components. Such an approach with respect the heritage site and the intangible activity would positively contribute to facilitate the aspirations of the visitors of all kinds.

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