

PRESERVING CULTURAL LANDSCAPES: A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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In the past two decades, 'Cultural Landscapes' have come to be recognized worldwide as a distinct resource type within preservation philosophy and practice. As a result, a variety of policy frameworks have been designed and put into practice for their effective protection and stewardship. Within the US, the National Park Service (NPS) is one of the most significant bodies involved in such preservation, and they have developed a system of preparing Cultural Landscape Inventories and Reports (CLI and CLR) to address sites under their administration. My research engages in placing the NPS approach within a world-view of similar (yet varied) concepts, particularly the UNESCO interpretation. The ultimate goal of the research is to investigate whether and how the NPS model can be adapted to the Indian milieu. Being one of the oldest living civilizations in the world, it is needless to say that there are a number of sites that qualify as cultural landscapes in India; yet presently there is no system to protect and manage them.

While it is well understood that endemic conditions would necessitate a culture-specific approach and caution has to be exercised in adapting the US model 'literally', I strongly believe that the true value of cross-cultural studies lies in learning across cultures. Therefore, it is proposed that the CLR framework can provide a good starting point for initiating preservation of cultural landscapes in India. Simultaneously, it is also anticipated that the following issues that are specific to the Indian context hold potential for making the American approach to CLR's more inclusive, and address some of its popular critique.

In this regard, the core issues that will be addressed are:

- The concept of time as 'cyclical' in the East as opposed to 'linear' in the West
- Emphasis on non-material/intangible resources in the East
- The occupation of most sites in India by 'traditional communities with 'modern' needs
- The necessity to link preservation with socio-economic development in a third-world context.

For the purpose of this research, two sites will be primarily used to support the ideas expressed. First, Bryce Canyon National Park-Utah, with which I have been involved for the past one year in preparing a Cultural Landscape Report, as a graduate student researcher. The second case study will be a site in south India inscribed on the World Heritage list as the 'Group of Monuments at Hampi'. Recent scholarship has amply highlighted the unique cultural landscape of the site, that derives significance from, not only its architectural monuments but unique irrigation systems, natural features, social traditions, etc. In such a scenario, I propose re-nomination of the site under and cultural landscape category and attempt to put forth a model Cultural Landscape Report that combines the approaches of NPS and UNESCO with the Indian preservation ethos.