

Heritage Management Plan of Rock Shelters of Bhimbetka (Madhya Pradesh) with special reference to Disaster Risk Management

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ABSTRACT

The world famous site of Bhimbetka lies about 45 km south east of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, India and is spread with an aerial span of more than 8 km. Scholars have enumerated more than 700 rock shelters in these clusters in the large aerial spread. Bhimbetka reflects a long interaction between people and the landscape, as demonstrated in the quantity and quality of its rock art and is closely associated with hunting and gathering economy as demonstrated in the rock art and in the relicts of this tradition in the local *adivasi* villages on the periphery of this site even till date. The vast area of Bhimbetka with its varied topography, ecological settings, archaeological remains and a number of stakeholders, like the Archaeological Survey of India, Forest Department, Revenue Department and the villagers of the 21 villages located around the core zone were exploiting the forest resources besides tourist pressures on the site were some of the key players in this World Heritage site. Not only this, there are a number of authorities, having jurisdiction over the total area (including the buffer area as per the World Heritage eligibility requirements) sometimes is the various laws in discordance with the optimal management of the site. In view of the various different types of resources, organizations, responsible for its maintenance, difference of perspectives due to the emphasis on implementation of laws based on varying concerns are problems for management of the site for posterity, for tourists and for the growth of the tourism industry.

The site of Bhimbetka with its vast geographical area, its large variety and quantity of natural and cultural wealth evidently has a large number of management issues that has yet to be resolved to the optimal levels of perspectives of the stake holding organizations. The foremost issue of management is disaster risk management of the site. Of all the ranges of risks such as forest fires, human vandalism, wood cutting, cattle grazing, vehicular pollution, increase rate of tourists, rock weathering, the risk of forest fires is utmost concern and hence a proper disaster risk management to overcome this risk factor is highly essential for these rock shelters. Intentional firing to remove the evidence of illegal tree falling in the area, burning of leaves as part of ground clearance of *Mahua* trees, smoking or casual use of fire and natural forest fire are some of the major threats to these rock shelters. This in turn results in change in bio-diversity, reduction in growth and density of vegetation, reduction in soil nutrients and extinction of many medicinal plants. Hence a proper management plan is required to safeguard this rich cultural heritage. The present paper deals in detail about the various management issues and suitable measures which can be adopted to mitigate the disaster risk management of the world heritage site.

Keywords: Heritage, Risk, Management, Disaster, International

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