

'Looking forward, looking back': narratives of hope and glory from the bridge at Hampi World Heritage Site, India

Krupa Rajangam

**Conservation Architect, Saythu...linking people and heritage + Research Scholar,
National Institute of Advanced Studies**

Abstract

In this paper I present certain ethnographic narratives centered on the life history of a bridge in the core zone of the Cultural World Heritage (WH) Site of Hampi, Karnataka, India. As the bridge began to be constructed resident communities started pinning certain hopes on it, they began to see it as more than just a physical link. Rather they saw it as a way to both look forward in hope of a better life and look back in hope of regaining lost glory.

The latter was particularly true for residents of Anegondi village on the north bank of the River Tungabhadra that flows through and divides the WH core. Anegondi was the originary, 'the cradle' of the 'glorious' medieval Vijayanagara Empire - the monuments and remains of their capital forms the core zone. Residents not only resent that their contribution to Vijayanagara history has been forgotten, they also feel sidelined, unable to access any tangible economic benefit of tourism and development that is available to the better connected villages of the south. For them the separation between north and south is ahistorical, acultural and asocial.

The bridge, however, was never finished. A stay order was brought on its completion because it was considered a threat to the site's integrity and authenticity. It was perceived to be completely out of scale and context to its WH setting. Finally after 10 years of diplomacy, debate and impasse, when local government recommenced works the partially finished bridge collapsed into the river.

The pause on peoples' lives, the sense of unfulfilled dreams, further narratives that came up since the collapse (which I interpret as attempts to make sense of the collapse of their hopes), all make us think about what heritage means to people, about what happens when the 'heritage idea', that also 'looks forward while looking back' intersects with peoples' lives.