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Pluralistic Heritage Governance in Maharashtra: A Case of Raigad Fort Conservation

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PLURALISTIC HERITAGE GOVERNANCE IN MAHARASHTRA: A CASE OF RAIGAD FORT CONSERVATION

Prajakta Divekar [±]

Abstract: *This paper investigates how the state of Maharashtra fulfils its constitutional mandate for heritage conservation within a pluralistic legal and institutional framework. While the central government governs only the national monuments, Indian states like Maharashtra oversee a complex and often fragmented heritage landscape that includes state-protected monuments, World Heritage Sites, urban heritage, and vernacular sites. The paper traces the layered legal and administrative apparatus that shapes heritage governance in Maharashtra and highlights the influence of colonial-era laws, postcolonial federal dynamics, and the ontological politics of heritage. Through a detailed case study of Raigad Fort—recently inscribed as part of the Maratha Military Landscape World Heritage Site—the paper demonstrates how multiple institutions, including the Archaeological Survey of India, Directorate of Archaeology, Raigad Development Authority, district-level bodies, and grassroots collectives (Gad Premi), coexist and contest authority over heritage. The analysis reveals that heritage in Maharashtra is not only regulated and preserved through statutory means but is also continuously redefined through affective practices, local activism, and political mobilisation.*

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I. Introduction

In 1960, Maharashtra was created based on a primary unifying factor: its linguistic identity. However, its built heritage reflects a diverse cultural history, as manifested in an impressive array of heritage structures ranging from rock-cut temples and Buddhist caves to grand forts and colonial-era buildings. Today, the officially recognised built heritage in Maharashtra includes 7 World Heritage Sites, 286 Monuments of National Importance, 376 state-protected monuments, and hundreds of locally listed heritage sites under regional and urban planning frameworks.¹ These multiple categories of heritage coexist within a single geographical and political space but are governed by distinct legal regimes and administrative structures that often overlap and interact. While the state government has a dedicated law and institutional apparatus for managing state-protected monuments, it also plays a role in overseeing other categories of heritage sites through coordination with central or local authorities. Heritage governance at the state level thus operates within a complex and pluralistic legal and institutional framework.

This paper examines how the state of Maharashtra fulfils its constitutional mandate for heritage conservation within a pluralistic governance framework. It argues that this framework is shaped not only by the legacies of colonial-era legislation and the decentralising imperatives of postcolonial federalism but also by the ontological politics of heritage, as manifested through popular memory and affective vernacular heritage practices. Focusing on the ongoing conservation efforts at Raigad Fort, this paper explores how multi-scalar heritage governance functions in practice, revealing that

¹ The 7 World Heritage Sites in Maharashtra include six cultural and one natural site. These are, Ajanta Caves (1983), Ellora Caves (1983), Elephanta Caves (1987), Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus (formerly Victoria Terminus) (2004), Victorian Gothic and Art Deco Ensembles of Mumbai (2018) and Western Ghats (2012) in natural category. In 2025, the Maratha Military Landscapes of India became the sixth cultural World Heritage Site to be inscribed from Maharashtra. For a detailed list of World Heritage Sites in India visit <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/in>.

heritage is not merely regulated and preserved but also lived, contested, and continuously redefined by multiple actors.

II. Constitutional Framework

The Constitution of India offers two approaches to the governance of heritage that have shaped the governance framework in Maharashtra.² First, in the spirit of cooperative federalism, the Indian Constitution grants both central and state governments the power to independently and jointly legislate and execute heritage matters.³ It thus distinguishes between two legal categories of heritage sites: monuments of national importance, to be protected and preserved by the central government, and state-protected monuments under the jurisdiction of individual states.

Further, national heritage protection is an *obligation* of the nation-state, implying that there is a hierarchy in heritage with national monuments being prioritised over other kinds of heritage.⁴ While the central government solely controls national heritage, the states are responsible for protecting national monuments as well as preserving and managing their own state-protected heritage.

Second, the Constitution also roots principles regarding heritage in two key pillars: fundamental rights and duties. It empowers Indian citizens with the right to protect their unique cultural heritage,⁵ while placing a responsibility on them to value and preserve

² Krishnan Mahajan. (2018). *Legally victimising national monuments: Role of Parliament, Union Government & Supreme Court*. Notion Press. This paper draws on Mahajan's (2018) formulation of two constitutional approaches to heritage- 'monuments-as-objects' and 'monuments-as-cultural heritage'. Mahajan argues that the central government, in its treatment of national monuments, has predominantly adopted an object-centric approach, viewing monuments as physical entities rather than shared cultural heritage. In contrast, this paper applies Mahajan's framework to the context of state-level heritage governance in Maharashtra, to demonstrate how the Indian Constitution allows for ontological pluralism, enabling diverse interpretations and practices that shape heritage governance at the state level.

³ India Const., Schedule VII, List I, Union List, Entry 67; List II, State List, Entry 12; and List III, Concurrent List, Entry 40.

⁴ India Const., Art. 49: "*It shall be the obligation of the state to protect every monument or place or object of artistic or historic interest, declared by or under law made by Parliament, to be of national importance, from spoliation, disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal or export, as the case may be.*"

⁵ India Const., Art. 29(1).

India's diversity in heritage.⁶ These provisions, read along with Article 49, have expanded opportunities for non-state actors, such as community and civil society groups and citizens, to actively engage in safeguarding heritage. This form of social advocacy has played a crucial role in shaping state-level heritage governance frameworks. Maharashtra serves as a prime example of this, being the first Indian state to implement urban heritage regulations, including specific rules for hill stations. *Chainani* gives a detailed account since the 1970s of the sustained efforts by Mumbai-based civil society groups in lobbying with governments both at the centre and the state level to foster collaborative action for heritage, and the subsequent passing of the first urban heritage regulations in India.⁷

Constitutional principles, when translated into legal instruments at the state level, produce a governance framework for heritage that is both hierarchical in design and fragmented, revealing cracks in intergovernmental coordination. As seen in the case of Maharashtra, the state-level framework reflects negotiated approaches that must reconcile the demands of urbanisation, regional identities, and community participation.

III. Legal and Institutional Framework

At the apex of Maharashtra's legal hierarchy is the Central Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act of 1958 and the 1959 Rules that govern the national monuments within the state. This Act is a postcolonial reformulation of the colonial-era legislation: the Ancient Monuments Preservation Act of 1904. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), also a colonial era legacy now an attached office of the Ministry of Culture, is the principal implementing agency for national monuments. In Maharashtra, national monuments are managed by three ASI Regional Circles: Aurangabad (75 sites), Mumbai (117 sites), and Nagpur (94 sites). These

⁶ India Const., Art. 51(a).

⁷ Shyam Chainani. (2007). *Heritage and environment: An Indian diary*. Urban Design Research Institute.

Circles work in silos and seldom collaborate with the state archaeology department for conservation work.

Over time, urban expansion and infrastructure development pressures led to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and Validation) Act of 2010, which introduced prohibitory (100m) and regulatory (200m) zones around monuments and created the National Monuments Authority (NMA), a quasi-judicial body working alongside the ASI, tasked with overseeing development controls.

Despite having no jurisdiction over the national monuments, the state government, in line with its constitutional mandate, assists ASI in governance matters, including demarcation of buffer zones around national monuments and removal of encroachments. In 2024, the Maharashtra government assisted ASI in the removal of 2594 unauthorised constructions in prohibited and 1778 in regulatory zones around national monuments in the state.⁸ It also plays a critical role in managing tourism, providing security, facilitating land acquisitions, assisting excavations, and implementing development initiatives around national monuments. Yet, despite this critical role, there has been little meaningful decentralisation or systematic coordination between the ASI and state governments. Multiple government reports have highlighted these shortcomings, calling attention to the ASI's operational limitations and the urgent need for reform.⁹ Further, when juxtaposed with the governance of state-protected monuments, where resource constraints have prompted more adaptive mechanisms and negotiated practices, the deficits in intergovernmental coordination for national monuments become more apparent. The 376 state-protected monuments in Maharashtra are governed by the Maharashtra Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and

⁸ Ministry of Culture. (2024, December 12). *Re-Demarcation of Prohibited/Regulated Boundaries of Protected Monuments*. Press Information Bureau. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleaseDetailm.aspx?PRID=2083767®=3&lang=2>.

⁹ NITI Aayog. (2020). *Working group report: Improving heritage management in India*. Government of India; Comptroller and Auditor General of India. (2013). *Report on performance audit of preservation and conservation of monuments and antiquities*. Government of India.

Remains Act (MAMASR Act) of 1960 and its 1962 Rules. This legislation was primarily enacted in reaction to the circumstances prevailing at the time of state formation, to manage monuments inherited from the princely state of Hyderabad and delisted national monuments that were under the repealed 1904 Act. It has not been substantively amended in over six decades.

The nodal agency for implementing the MAMASR Act is the Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, whose work is divided across six regional divisions: Ratnagiri, Nashik, Pune, Aurangabad, Nanded, and Nagpur. Unlike the ASI, the Directorate is not autonomous but functions under the state government's Department of Cultural Affairs, with limited decision-making authority and must seek approval and permission from the parent department for the initiation and execution of conservation projects. The Directorate is chronically understaffed, inadequately funded, and has limited conservation capacity.¹⁰ The conservation activities of the Directorate often go beyond structural preservation, extending to multiple stakeholder facilitations, public-private partnerships, political negotiations, collaborations,¹¹ and conflict-resolution.¹²

To enhance the conservation efforts, the state government has introduced the public-private partnership (PPP) model for guardianship of monuments through schemes like the 2007 '*Maharashtra Vaibhav*- State Protected Monuments Conservation Scheme.' However, this initiative raises concerns about the privatisation of public heritage,¹³ and

¹⁰ Kulkarni, D. (2017, June 8). *Need funds to conduct excavations: Maharashtra's archaeology dept.* DNA India. <https://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-need-funds-to-conduct-excavations-maha-s-archaeology-dept-2465084>.; NDTV. (2019, December 10). *Maharashtra has only 80 watchmen to guard 375 heritage monuments: Report.* <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/maharashtra-has-only-80-watchmen-to-guard-375-protected-monuments-report-2146430>.

¹¹ Sandeep Dighe. (2022, May 25). State govt allots ₹109cr for Jejuri temple upkeep. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/state-govt-allots-109cr-for-jejuri-temple-upkeep/articleshow/91775956.cms>.

¹² Solapur historians, State Archaeology Dept in clash over temple inscription. (2017, October 1). *Pune Mirror*. https://punemirror.com/others/solapur-historians-state-archaeology-dept-in-clash-over/cid5133239.htm#google_vignette.

¹³ See Naldurga, Heritage. (2024, November 25). *Bombay Environmental Action Group*. <https://beag.in/naldurg>.

risks undermining state accountability and constitutional responsibility for long-term stewardship.¹⁴

Apart from national and state protected monuments, Maharashtra has designated World Heritage Sites (WHS) whose management adheres to rigorous international standards.¹⁵ These sites are governed under existing multilevel legal and institutional frameworks, including international advisory bodies (e.g. ICOMOS), the ASI, the state government, and local municipal authorities.

While the World Heritage status enhances global visibility and provides an added layer of protection, it also introduces new governance challenges, such as managing tourism influxes, balancing international expectations with local realities, and integrating diverse stakeholders with conflicting interests.¹⁶ The gap in capacity and coordination between different levels of government remains a persistent issue even in the case of WHS. Nonetheless, the international framework provides opportunities for reimagining heritage governance, as can be seen in the case of Raigad Fort Conservation, where World Heritage status has introduced new governance innovations that are causing a shift away from the traditional preservationist perspective embedded in the national and state frameworks to a more dynamic view of heritage that embraces transformations and community participation.

In parallel, Maharashtra has also pioneered urban heritage regulations through the Maharashtra Regional and Town Planning (MR&TP) Act of 1966, which provides for designating a distinct category of ‘Listed’ heritage sites and integrating heritage

¹⁴ 28 monuments in district under adoption scheme. (2022, July 21). *Deshdoot*. <https://deshdoot.com/28-monuments-in-district-under-adoption-scheme/>.

¹⁵ In 1977 India became a signatory to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, also known as World Heritage Convention (WHC), Maharashtra’s Ajanta and Ellora caves were among the first Indian sites to be recognized for their ‘Outstanding Universal Value’. See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/in>.

¹⁶ Press Trust of India. (2025, January 7). *Tourist footfall decreases at Ellora, other ASI sites in Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar*. *Deccan Herald*. https://www.deccanherald.com/india/maharashtra/tourist-footfall-decreases-at-ellora-other-asi-sites-in-chhatrapati-sambhajnagar-3345072#google_vignette.

conservation into the urban and regional planning framework. In 1995, Mumbai became the first Indian city to offer legal protection for heritage sites. This was the result of a sustained civil society advocacy and protracted efforts by activists like Shyam Chainani, Cyrus Guzder, Dr. Forrokh Wadia, Heta Pandit, and Architect Vikas Dilawari, who played a crucial role in lobbying and collaborating with both central and state governments, thereby fostering a participatory approach to heritage conservation.¹⁷ These movements have emerged in response to the challenges of balancing urban growth with preserving the city's unique cultural legacy. The urban heritage framework was extended to Pune, Nagpur, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Nashik and others, where its implementation has been inconsistent with heritage committees existing only on paper, heritage lists un-notified, and legal protections weakly enforced.

In 2018, the Unified Development Control and Promotion Regulations (UDCPR) introduced under the MR&TP Act marked a shift in heritage governance at the district, regional and local level as it mandated the formation of Heritage Conservation Committees (HCCs) under each planning authority and provided guidelines for listing, grading, and managing heritage buildings.¹⁸ However, under UDCPR, the listed heritage properties remain the responsibility of private owners, with little financial or institutional support from the state government, unlike the national or state protected monuments.

A crucial yet understated role in Maharashtra's heritage governance is played by the District Planning Committees (DPC) that are established under the Maharashtra District Planning Committees (Constitution and Functions) Act of 1998. Although there is no specific mandate for heritage governance, DPCs are involved with the protection and

¹⁷ Shyam Chainani. *Heritage and environment: An Indian diary*. Urban Design Research Institute (2007).

¹⁸ Unified Development Control and Promotion Regulations (UDCPR). (2023). *Section 14.5*. https://www.mmrda.maharashtra.gov.in/sites/default/files/2023-10/UDCPR_compressed_2.pdf. Based on the National Building Code and Model Building Byelaws provided by the Ministry of Urban Development, incorporating heritage preservation into planning.

conservation of both protected and unprotected heritage sites. DPC, a pivotal institution for inter-departmental coordination for implementation of development activities in the district, is led by the District in-charge Minister with the Collector as its secretary. 3% of the annual District Planning budget is to be earmarked for the conservation of state-protected monuments, creating a modest dedicated fund to ensure greater consistency and continuity in conservation work across districts.

Taken together, Maharashtra's heritage governance framework reflects the plurality of conservation approaches and legal perspectives on heritage. While this framework is marked by institutional fragmentation, weak enforcement, and inter-governmental tensions, evident in governance challenges spanning national, state and local heritage, the framework further becomes more hybrid as it intersects with the ontological politics of heritage as seen in the case of Raigad Fort.

Heritage sites are political landscapes, wherein civil society and communities do not merely advocate but also compete for custodianship. As seen in the case of Raigad, heritage often accrues meanings beyond its designation by the state. Fort become sites where memory, identity, power, and preservation intersect, and where the boundary between participatory governance and populist appropriation is often blurred.

IV. DIFFERENT LEGAL MEANINGS OF BUILT HERITAGE

The legal definitions of heritage vary across different categories of heritage. The national and state monuments, although governed by separate laws, have an overlapping definition. This includes ancient and historical monuments, such as rock-cut structures, caves, inscriptions, monoliths, and sculptures, along with their remains and surrounding areas. A key distinction between these sites is that centrally protected monuments are recognised as being of “*national importance*,” a term that, however, is not explicitly

defined in the central legislation.¹⁹ Neither central nor state archaeological law mentions the term ‘heritage’, but the definition almost exclusively focuses on the historical, archaeological or artistic significance of monuments, as well as their age: national monuments are typically over 100 years old, while state monuments are at least 50 years old. Both national and state archaeological laws are influenced by colonial-era law and do not integrate with other post-independence heritage protection laws.

The World Heritage Convention offers a relatively broad understanding of heritage, which includes both natural and cultural aspects. It defines “*cultural heritage*” under three categories: monuments, groups of buildings and sites that have an ‘Outstanding Universal Value’ (OUV) based on their significance for art, architecture, science, history, archaeology, aesthetics, ethnology and anthropology.²⁰ There is no specific age value required for designating WHS. Despite the broad and extensive definition of heritage, in practice, applying the OUV principle in the World Heritage framework has been challenging.²¹

The category of ‘listed’ heritage sites protected under the MR&TP Act of 1966 are defined in terms of ‘heritage building’ or ‘precinct’, which is any structure or area with architectural, aesthetic, historic, or cultural value, officially designated so by the relevant planning authority. Additionally, the UDCPR, mandated under the MR&TP Act, expands this definition further to include heritage buildings with ‘environmental value’. These regulations do not offer a fixed age value for heritage.

¹⁹ Sanjeev Sanyal, Jayasimha K. R., & Apurv Kumar Mishra. (2023). *Monuments of national importance: The urgent need for rationalization* [PDF]. Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Government of India. <https://eacpm.gov.in/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Monuments-of-National-Importance.pdf>.

²⁰ See UNESCO. (1972). *Convention concerning the protection of the world cultural and natural heritage*. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>.

²¹ See Tanja Vahtikari. (2017). *Valuing world heritage cities*. Routledge. for further discussion on the ambiguities and lack of global consensus on the definition of OUV and its application in World Heritage Convention.

The legal definitions discussed here, although slightly varying across regulatory frameworks, limit the idea of heritage to the material realm, making it legible and thus governable. In the process, heritage sites are transformed into legal entities, acquiring new identities shaped by the regulatory frameworks rather than lived practices. These legal constructions frequently dominate public discourse on heritage, marginalising alternative ways of knowing, remembering, and engaging with heritage sites. This creates a persistent tension between what is legally recognised as heritage and the diverse, often affective ways in which communities relate and interact with it.

Further, when formal governance frameworks prove weak or fragmented, the resulting gaps are often filled in by political groups, creating ambivalent spaces where alternative associations with heritage become entangled with processes of governing. The case of Raigad Fort demonstrates how these multiple layers of constitutional mandates, colonial legal legacies, decentralised institutions, and vernacular meanings of heritage converge, sometimes reinforcing and often conflicting in the practice of governing heritage.

V. Case Study: Raigad Fort Conservation

The conservation of Raigad Fort, one of the 48 centrally protected forts in Maharashtra, and recently inscribed (2025) as a part of the *Maratha Military Landscape of India* World Heritage Site, offers a compelling lens through which one can examine the layered and contested terrain of heritage governance in postcolonial India.²² This case illuminates how Maharashtra negotiates its heritage stewardship through intersecting institutional, legal, affective, and political frameworks. Raigad not only reveals a multi-scalar governance structure involving the ASI, Directorate of Archaeology, newly established authorities like the Raigad Development Authority (RDA), and district-level

²² Ministry of Culture Government of India. (2025, July 11). *Maratha military landscapes of India inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List as India's 44th entry*. Press Information Bureau. <https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2144154>.

bodies, but also foregrounds the vernacular claims and ontological framings of grassroots stakeholders who contest and reconfigure the meaning and management of heritage.

VI. Historical Trajectories and Roots of Vernacular Heritage Stewardship

Raigad's symbolic centrality dates to its selection by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj as the capital of the Maratha kingdom and the site of his coronation in 1674. As a hill fort, it exemplifies the strategic use of rugged terrain, fortified elevation, and architectural self-sufficiency that characterise the Maratha hill fort typology.²³

Despite its relative stability for nearly a century after the death of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in 1680, the fort was bombarded and significantly damaged following the British conquest in 1818. Its subsequent neglect, despite its centrality in Maratha memory, was publicly highlighted in 1880 by Mahatma Jyotirao Phule, who is credited for rediscovering Shivaji's *samadhi* (memorial) and began celebrating his birth anniversary at the fort.²⁴ James Douglas (1883) too wrote about this neglect when he described the fort as being in shambles.²⁵ Early formal efforts at memorialisation and restoration were spearheaded by nationalist figures such as Lokmanya Tilak, who established the Shri Shivaji Raigad Smarak Mandal (SSRSM) in 1895. While these efforts channelled public sentiment through initiatives like the "*Shivaji Fund*," substantive restoration only began in 1926, reflecting a disjuncture between the affective reverence and institutional action.

VII. Multilevel Governance: Legal and Institutional Interfaces

Raigad was designated a centrally protected monument in 1909 and remains under the jurisdiction of ASI, Mumbai Circle. The fort's conservation is governed by the AMASR

²³ Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra, & Archaeological Survey of India. (2024). *Overarching management plan for the Maratha Military Landscapes of India* (World Heritage Convention Document) <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/209713>.

²⁴ Hari Narke. (2022, June 20). *Shivaji Maharajanchi samadhi Mahatma Phuleanni shodhūn sundar keli hoti: Dr. Hari Narke* [The tomb of Shivaji Maharaj was discovered and beautified by Mahatma Phule: Dr. Hari Narke]. *Sarkarnama*. <https://sarkarnama.esakal.com/mumbai/hari-narke-says-shivaji-maharajs-samadhi-was-discovered-and-beautified-by-mahatma-phule-rm82>.

²⁵ James Douglas. (1883). *A Book of Bombay*.

Act (1958). The ASI carries out periodic conservation interventions, often under challenging conditions given the fort's location on a steep hill and its vulnerability to natural forces. The NMA regulates the prohibited (100 meters) and regulated (200 meters) zones around the monument, as per the provisions of the Central Act.²⁶

However, given the fort's symbolic stature and public attention, the government of Maharashtra has repeatedly sought greater participation in the governance of Raigad, including a demand for the transfer of the site's custodianship to the state. This culminated in a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of India, ASI, and the Government of Maharashtra in 2016. This agreement led to the creation of the Raigad Development Authority (RDA).²⁷ The RDA oversees infrastructural and tourism development in the broader 88-acre Raigad Fort Complex Heritage Precinct, including 21 villages.²⁸ While the ASI retains control over the core archaeological site, leading excavations and structural conservation work, it collaborates with RDA on advanced documentation, digital surveys, and landscape planning.²⁹ Over 300 archaeological sites within the fort precinct have been identified for phased excavation, expected to continue over multiple decades.

In parallel development, the Maharashtra government reinvigorated the Fort Conservation Committee, initially established in 2015, expanding its mandate to include documentation of unprotected forts, preparing comprehensive development plans, and engaging community actors in preservation and promotion of forts. Additionally, district-level committees led by District Collectors and including police, local planning

²⁶ Public Information Bureau, Government of India. (2024, December 19). *Progress and challenges of conservation, restoration and excavation of Raigad Fort* [Press release]. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2086005>.

²⁷ RDA is headed by a political leader, Sambhaji Shahu Chhatrapati, who is a descendent of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and belongs to the royal family of Chhatrapati Shahu of Kolhapur. Until 2022, he was a Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament. See:- <https://shahuchhatrapatikolhapur.in/>

²⁸ See <https://www.raigadpradhikaran.com/master.php>.

²⁹ For more information on RDA's work and projects, see: <https://raigadpradhikaran.com>.

authorities, ASI and state archaeology officials, have been set up to counter illegal encroachments at historic forts and promote coordinated enforcement.³⁰

This layered model of governance, though procedurally complex, demonstrates a negotiated balance between central authority, state initiative and community participation. Raigad's recent World Heritage status has catalysed inter-departmental convergence and long-term planning, although formal legal jurisdictions often remain blurred and contested.

VIII. Heritage Management Challenges and Adaptive Institutional Responses

Despite institutional convergence, Raigad's conservation presents acute logistical and environmental challenges. The construction of the Raigad Ropeway in 1994, a private-public initiative with SSRS support, greatly increased visitor accessibility, leading to infrastructural strain and risk to archaeological integrity due to crowding, especially during public holidays and commemorative events.³¹ Seasonal hazards like landslides, monsoon erosion, blocked natural drainage, and rockfalls exacerbate the vulnerability of built heritage.

To address these issues, a site-specific management plan was developed involving both the state-level apex advisory committee and the district-level monitoring body, chaired by the Raigad District Collector, including representatives from the ASI, Directorate of Archaeology, and the tourism department, and drawing on engineers and conservation specialists.³² This model suggests an incremental shift towards decentralised planning. However, statutory constraints under the AMASR Act, especially those concerning the

³⁰ *Preserving Maha heritage: District level committees to combat fort encroachments*. (2025, January 18). *Daijiworld*. <https://daijiworld.com/news/newsDisplay?newsID=1263505>.

³¹ See Raigad Ropeway. (n.d.). <https://raigadropeway.com/founder.html>.

³² Directorate of Archaeology and Museums, Maharashtra, & Archaeological Survey of India. (2024). *Overarching management plan for the Maratha Military Landscapes of India* (World Heritage Convention Document). <https://whc.unesco.org/en/documents/209713>.

regulated zones, and bureaucratic proceduralism at all levels, delayed responsiveness, reflect the limits of technocratic legalism in heritage governance.

IX. Ontological Politics and Vernacular Heritage Practices

While Raigad is formally governed as a national monument, it also functions as a sacred and political landscape. Grassroots actors, collectively referred to in Maharashtra, in broad terms, as *Gad Premi* (Fort Lovers), venerate Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj not merely as a historical ruler but as a divine figure and symbol of regional pride. These groups, including informal trekking communities, youth mandals, cultural organisations, and political outfits, enact a parallel model of stewardship. They engage in activities that transcend *conservation-as-policy* and invoke *heritage-as-devotion*. These include pilgrimage treks to Raigad, cleanliness drives, flag hoisting, and ritual commemorations at Shivaji's *samadhi* (memorial), all of which embody an ontological framing of heritage as something lived, embodied, and venerated, and this often clashes with formal conservation discourse.³³ Such affective practices challenge the supposed neutrality of technocratic regulatory practices of the state.

The *Gad Premi* groups have emerged as crucial stakeholders in the conservation discourse through their relentless advocacy-manifested in campaigns, petitions, and media mobilisation, that have pressurised the state to take cognisance of long-standing neglect and allocate resources for fort conservation. In this sense, they serve as an informal accountability mechanism, compensating for institutional inertia and catalysing state action. However, this role is also ambivalent, as in the absence of structured engagement channels and clear state-led conservation strategies, these diverse groups also engage in unauthorised restorations, constructions, and commemorations that sometimes cause physical damage to fragile archaeological

³³ *Fort conservation work to start soon.* (2018, January 8). *Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/kolhapur/fort-conservation-work-to-start-soon/articleshow/62420625.cms>. In 2018, The Shri Shiv Pratishthan Hindustan, an outfit led by Sambhaji Bhide, a Hindutva activist had announced installation of Shivaji's throne in gold at Raigad.

remains.³⁴ These actions, though well-intentioned, frequently conflict with conservation principles and regulatory norms laid down by state institutions.³⁵ Many of these organisations are aligned with or supported by political parties and wield considerable influence at the local and regional levels.³⁶ As a result, the state agencies often find themselves navigating a delicate balance between responding to popular pressure and safeguarding professional conservation standards. As per a recent initiative by the Maharashtra government, local youth from *Gad Premi* communities will be trained and formally integrated as certified guides at Raigad.³⁷ This represents an attempt to co-opt vernacular actors in the formal framework, marking a shift toward hybrid governance. Yet, the state's challenge lies in managing the inherent tensions of allowing locally meaningful engagements while upholding regulatory discipline and scientific standards of conservation.

X. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that heritage governance in Maharashtra is characterised by pluralism of legal meanings, institutional actors, and affective claims. Far from being a top-down, state-centric enterprise, heritage conservation in the state operates across multiple levels and categories, from national legislation and UNESCO norms to regional planning regulations and vernacular practices. The case of Raigad Fort shows how formal institutions like ASI and the Directorate of Archaeology coexist with, and

³⁴ *Swords were drawn at the event on Sarasgad..* (2020, December 28). *ETV Bharat Marathi*. <https://www.etvbharat.com/marathi/maharashtra/state/raigad/swords-were-drawn-at-the-event-on-sarasgad/mh20201228161503943>.

³⁵ Neha Madaan. (2024, February 25). *Pratapgad fort restoration hit over 'incorrect' use of material. The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/pratapgad-fort-restoration-halted-due-to-use-of-incorrect-material/articleshow/107979582.cms>.

³⁶ *Vishalgad violence: 500 booked for arson and rioting after Chhatrapati Sambhaji's call for anti-encroachment; Kolhapur MP Shahu Maharaj condemns violence.* (2024, July 31). *Hindustan Times*. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/pune-news/vishalgad-violence-500-booked-for-arson-and-rioting-after-chhatrapati-sambhaji-s-call-for-anti-encroachment-kolhapur-mp-shahu-maharaj-condemns-violence-101721067158516.html>.

³⁷ Purnima Sah. (2025, July 26). *After UNESCO recognition, Maharashtra to train locals as guides at Maratha forts. The Hindu*.

are often challenged by grassroots actors who articulate heritage through embodied regional pride and devotion. These parallel frameworks of custodianship underscore the ontological plurality inherent in heritage governance.

The interaction of these frameworks creates a hybrid governance model, such as Raigad's tripartite custodianship and community participation, which seems more inclusive in form. Yet, such a hybrid model reveals frictions between professional conservation ethics and emotive claims to heritage. Maharashtra's experience calls for a more adaptive and reflective approach to heritage governance, one that recognises not just the legal status of monuments but also the layered meanings and role of non-state actors and their association with heritage. As states shoulder greater responsibility for heritage protection, understanding these pluralistic and negotiated terrains become vital for shaping more democratic and resilient heritage futures.



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