



Preserving Cultural Heritage

This editorial is based on [“A thumbs down for the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme”](#) which was published in the Hindu BusinessLine on 01/03/2023. It discusses the issue with the Adopt a Heritage’ scheme and what can be done to preserve the Cultural Heritage of India.

For Prelims: Adopt a Heritage’ scheme, Archaeological Survey of India, Geographic Information System, Remote Sensing

For Mains: Government Policies & Interventions, Indian Heritage Sites, Preservation of Cultural Heritage

In Feb 2023, the government announced that it will hand over around 1,000 monuments to the private sector for their upkeep under the control of the [Archaeological Survey of India](#).

The Indian government has **launched a revamped version of the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme**. It aimed at **encouraging private companies, public sector units, and other firms to adopt and maintain State-owned archaeological sites** and monuments. The businesses that enter such agreements will be known as “Monument Mitras.”

The government aims to **adopt 500 protected sites by 15th August 2023**, and another 500 sites shortly thereafter, which would be a tenfold increase in the number of sites brought under the ambit of the **original ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme launched in 2017**.

However, the **'revamped' scheme, however, has some serious flaws**, and the nation's valuable pluralistic heritage is at risk of extinction.

There are a number of concerns raised about the Adopt a Heritage Scheme including historical preservation, community, traffic, tourism, and corporate interests which needs to be addressed.

What are the Issues with the Adopt a Heritage Scheme?

- **Lack of Expertise:**
 - Allowing businesses without expertise in heritage preservation to construct and maintain heritage sites can lead to the risk of losing historical significance and misrepresenting India's past.
 - **Example:** Permitting a watch company without expertise in bridge engineering to maintain a [colonial-era bridge in Morbi, Gujarat](#), possibly contributed to a heart-wrenching tragedy.
- **Undermining the Mandate of ASI:**
 - The scheme sidelines the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and disregards the Sarnath Initiative**, which provides guidelines for safekeeping excavated objects and presenting them to visitors in an engaging manner.

- **Duplication of Infrastructure:**
 - Some monuments selected for the scheme already have tourist infrastructure, which raises questions about the need for new ticket offices and gift shops.
- **Diminishing Public Space:**
 - The scheme allows **businesses to occupy prime public land and build their brands, which may further diminish the grounds** around iconic monuments.
- **Undermining Local Communities:**
 - The scheme may **undermine local communities' relationships with historical sites, endangering livelihoods of those who have lived near the site** and made a living by regaling visitors with stories of its colourful past.
- **Alteration of Historical Character:**
 - Some monuments selected for the scheme are not protected by the ASI, and businesses may be able to alter their historical character without much opposition.
- **Risk of Monuments Being Converted into Hotels:**
 - If monuments are not adopted by Monument Mitras in the predetermined time frame, they may be converted into hotels, prioritizing tourism and corporate interests over historical preservation.
 - According to media reports, the Uttar Pradesh government has started turning over such monuments to the Tourism Department to convert them into hotels. They include **Chunar Fort**, a citadel overlooking Barwasagar Lake, and several residences built by Awadh's Nawabs.

What are the Other Issues with the Heritage Protection in India?

- **Limited Trained Manpower:**
 - Government agencies may have **limited resources, particularly experimental and numerical facilities**, which prevent them from undertaking structural safety research and development.
 - The lack of efforts to mainstream heritage preservation as a career and provide skills remains a formidable challenge at the institutional level.
- **Infrastructural Shortcomings:**
 - There is a **lack of convergence between modern-day engineering education and traditional knowledge of construction materials** and practices; this is a serious hindrance to preservation of heritage.
- **Informalisation of Systems:**
 - Formal systems are absent in India, which recognise the need for use of scientific tools for diagnosis and quantitative assessment of residual capacity before choosing repair or strengthening strategy.
 - India has a large stock of heritage structures, which has to be addressed through a formal platform focussing on their structural safety.
- **Lack of Awareness:**
 - There is **widespread lack of civic sense among domestic visitors** who tend to deface historical monuments e.g. by inscribing their names on historical monuments.
- **Environmental Pollution:**
 - There are **several types of environmental pollution** which are killing the heritage properties e.g. Taj Mahal was badly affected by **Sulphur dioxide** etc. emitted by the oil refinery at Mathura.
- **Lack of Funding:**
 - Finances continue to be crucial challenges for preservation of cultural heritage. The conservation and preservation of heritage has not received due attention from public authorities.
- **Outdated Mechanism of Excavation and Exploration:**
 - Due to the prevalence of outdated mechanisms, **Geographic Information System and Remote Sensing** are rarely used in exploration.
 - Also, local bodies involved in urban heritage projects are often not equipped enough to handle heritage conservation.

What should be the Way Forward?

- **Making Citizens Aware:**
 - **Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** funds can be **earmarked for researching, writing, and publishing high-quality textbooks** on history and monuments, as well as developing innovative teaching methods.
 - This approach can be **effective in educating citizens about the value of monuments and promoting their preservation.**
 - Corporates might also **follow the lead taken by Sudha Murthy and N.R. Narayana Murthy in giving gifts to organisations** such as the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune to continue their missions of writing history by rationally coordinating the textual record and the archaeological evidence.
- **Encourage Traders to Donate Funds:**
 - **Encourage traders and shopkeepers to donate funds to school libraries** to collect archival materials such as books, maps, and old photographs relevant to local monuments.
 - This approach can **be a cost-effective way to provide students with access to historical resources and help them appreciate the value of monuments** in their community.
- **Use CSR Funds to Purchase Equipment:**
 - **Use CSR funds to purchase equipment that reduces pollution** and protects heritage buildings.
 - This approach can be an effective way to preserve heritage buildings and prevent their decay.
 - In the past, **Tata Sons, Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), and other companies have regularly contributed funds to organisations training individuals** in much needed restoration skills and creating jobs for them.

Drishti Mains Question

What measures can India take to effectively preserve and protect cultural heritage sites and artifacts, while balancing the need for access and tourism with conservation efforts?

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q.1 Safeguarding the Indian Art Heritage is the need of the moment. Discuss. **(2018)**

Q.2 Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss. **(2020)**