



Preserving Our Past, Forging Our Future

This editorial is based on [“Heritage conservation can drive climate action”](#) which was published in Hindustan Times on 08/12/2022. It talks about the Indian Heritage Conservation and its role in climate action.

For Prelims: Archeological Survey of India (ASI), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH), National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA) 2007, Adopt a Heritage Programme, Project Mausam.

For Mains: Role of India's Rich Heritage in Embracing its Cultural Identity, International Conventions Relating to Heritage, Recent Government Initiatives Related to Heritage Conservation.

India has a **rich heritage** that is a storehouse of **archaeological assets and mind-blowing monuments**. They represent a unique legacy of civilization and therefore the **conservation of built heritage** is generally perceived to be in the **long term interest of society**.

But the majority of India's architectural heritage and sites remain **unidentified and largely** unprotected, and even those that are protected are facing challenges related to climate change and **unsustainable tourism practices**. Therefore, the **issues related to Indian Heritage** must be carefully identified and solved in a comprehensive manner.

What is a Heritage?

- Heritage is deemed to mean those **buildings, artefacts, structures, areas and precincts** that are of historic, aesthetic, architectural, ecological or cultural significance.
- It must be recognized that the **'cultural landscape' around a heritage site is critical for the interpretation of the site** and its built heritage and thus is very much its integral part.
- The **three key concepts** that can be considered to determine whether a property can be listed as a Heritage are:
 - **Historic significance**
 - **Historic integrity**
 - **Historic context.**
- In India, heritage comprises archaeological sites, remains, ruins.
 - The primary custodian of **'Monuments and Sites'** in the country, i.e. [Archeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) and their counterparts protect them.

What is the Role of India's Rich Heritage in Embracing its Cultural Identity?

- **Storytellers of Indian History:** Heritage is a legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes through the generations that are **inherited, preserved, and passed on**.

- Heritage has been **woven into the fabric of Indian society with spiritual, religious, social, and political significance.**
- **Embracing Diversity:** India heritage is itself a museum of different types, communities, customs, traditions, religions, cultures, beliefs, languages, castes and social systems.
- **Tolerating Nature:** Indian society gave every **culture the opportunity of prospering that is reflected in its diverse heritage.** It does not try to suppress diversity in favour of uniformity.

What are the International Conventions Relating to Heritage?

- [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\)](#)
- **Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, 1977**
- **Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, 2005**
- [Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2006](#)
- **United Nations World Heritage Committee: India has been elected as a member of the committee for the term 2021-25**

What are the Challenges Associated with Heritage Conservation in India?

- **Pollution and Climate Change:** [Pollution](#) is another problem faced by our heritage sites and India is still struggling to save its wonder, **Taj Mahal** from the pollution.
 - Of late, India is seeing a spate of **floods due to [climate change](#) in various parts of the country** including in those locations where heritage sites are located.
 - [Puri in Odisha](#) and [Hampi in Karnataka](#) are some of the latest examples of **heritage sites getting damaged due to natural calamities** which in turn is said to be the **result of [global warming](#).**
- **Heritage Encroachments:** Many ancient monuments have been encroached upon by **local residents, shopkeepers, and souvenir sellers.**
 - There is **no harmony between these structures and the architectural style of monuments** or the surroundings.
 - For instance, according to the [Comptroller and Auditor-General of India \(CAG\) Report, 2013](#), there was encroachment on the **Taj Mahal's premises near Khan-i-Alam's Bagh.**
- **Exploitation over Excavation:** Development activities have exploited many archaeological sites in India with rich deposits of artefacts.
 - Also, there is **no provision for Cultural Resource Management** before developmental projects, which adds to the problem.
- **Lack of Database for Heritage Sites:** There is no comprehensive national database with state-by-state distribution of heritage structures in India.
 - [Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage \(INTACH\)](#) has inventoried about **60,000 buildings in around 150 cities**, but that's still just the tip of the iceberg since there are estimated to be over **4000 heritage towns and cities throughout the country.**
- **Lack of Human Resource:** Lack of adequate numbers of qualified and competent **human resources** to look after the monuments and **carry out conservation activities** is the biggest problem faced by **agencies like ASI.**

What are the Recent Government Initiatives Related to Heritage Conservation?

- **National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), 2007**
- [Adopt a Heritage Programme](#)
- [Project Mausam](#)

What Should be the Way Forward?

- **Reimagining Excavation and Conservation Policy:** In light of the **changing scenarios with the advancement in technology**, ASI needs to update its Excavation Policy.
 - Using new technology such as [Photogrammetry](#) & **3D Laser scanning**, [LiDAR](#) and [satellite remote sensing surveys](#) should be used for documentation, surveys, excavation and conservation.
- **Smart City, Smart Heritage:** It is necessary to consider the **Heritage Impact Assessment** for all large infrastructure projects.
 - The **Heritage Identification and Conservation Projects** need to be adjoined to the city master plans and **integrate with the Smart City Initiative**.
- **Innovative Strategies for Increasing Engagement:** The **use of monuments that do not attract a large number of visitors** and not have cultural/religious sensitivity can serve as **venues for cultural and wedding programmes** that can fulfil twin objective:
 - The **promotion of the associated intangible heritage**.
 - **Increasing visitor numbers** to such sites.
- **Corporate Heritage Responsibility:** Companies should be encouraged to take on restoration and preservation of monuments as part of their [Corporate Social Responsibility\(CSR\)](#) obligations.
- **Linking Heritage Conservation with Climate Action:** Heritage sites can serve as **opportunities for climate communication and education**, and **research on historic sites and practices** to understand past responses to changing climate conditions can help **adaptation and mitigation planners develop strategies that integrate natural science and cultural heritage**.
 - For example, **coastal and river communities such as the island of [Majuli](#) in India** have been living **with and adapting to changing water levels** for centuries.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss major challenges related to India Heritage sites. Also suggest how climate action can be linked with Heritage Conservation.

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)**

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