



Our Heritage, Our Responsibility

This editorial is based on [“CAG report on abysmal state of heritage conservation”](#) which was published in Indian Express on 01/09/2022. It talks about the status of Heritage Conservation in India and related issues.

For Prelims: UNESCO World Heritage Site, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Fundamental Duties, Geographic Information System, Satellite Remote Sensing Surveys, LiDAR

For Mains: Constitutional Provisions Related to Indian Heritage, Issues Related to Heritage Conservation in India, Solutions For Effective Heritage Management

India has one of the largest geo-political expanses and one of the **greatest volume and diversity in heritage**. This vast heritage repository of India is recognized globally as a **significant part of its unique cultural identity**.

Indian Heritage is valuable and informative in terms of **socio-cultural, socio-political, socio-economical and even technological activities** of a specific society or group of individuals or an individual from the past.

There are 40 [World Heritage Sites in India](#), including 32 cultural sites, 7 natural sites, and 1 Mixed site. Also, approximately **3,691 monuments** in the custody of [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) are declared as monuments of national importance.

However, a number of heritage structures do not come under any formal system due to which the potential of **India's unsurmountable heritage remains largely untapped**.

What are the Constitutional and Legislative Provisions Related to Indian Heritage?

- The **Constitution of India** has divided the jurisdiction over the **monuments, cultural heritage, and archaeological sites** as follows:
 - **Union:** Monuments and sites of historical and archaeological significance, as designated by law by Parliament.
 - **State:** Ancient and Historical Monuments other than those declared by Parliament to be of national importance.
 - **Concurrent:** Both the Union and States have concurrent jurisdiction over archaeological sites and remains other than those declared of national importance by law.
- **Directive Principles of State Policy:** [Article 49](#) puts obligation on 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**.

- **Fundamental Duty: [Article 51A of Constitution](#)** states that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to **value and preserve the rich heritage of our culture.**
- **Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act) 1958:** It is an act of the Parliament of India that provides for the **preservation of ancient and historical monuments and archaeological sites** and remains of national importance, for the regulation of archaeological excavations and for the protection of sculptures, carvings and other like objects.

What are the Main Types of Heritage?

- **Cultural Heritage:** It includes the **physical**, or tangible cultural heritage, such as artworks. These are generally split into two groups of movable and immovable heritage.
 - **Immovable heritage** includes **buildings, historic places and monuments.**
 - **Moveable heritage** includes **books, documents, moveable artworks, music** and other artefacts that are considered worthy of preservation for the future.
- **Natural Heritage:** It encompasses the countryside and natural environment, including **flora and fauna.**
 - **Natural Heritage** can also include cultural landscapes (**natural features that may have cultural attributes**).
- **Intangible Heritage:** It consists of **non-physical aspects** of a particular culture, more often maintained by **social customs** during a specific period in history.
 - These include **social values and traditions, customs and practices, aesthetic and spiritual beliefs, artistic expression, language** and other aspects of human activity.
 - Naturally, **intangible cultural heritage is more difficult to preserve than physical objects.**

How Rich Heritage Influences India's Cultural Identity?

- **StoryTellers of India's Glory:** Heritage is the legacy of physical artefacts and intangible attributes of society that are **inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and preserved for the benefit of future generations.**
 - As the **storytellers of India's past**, heritage emerged with **spiritual, religious, social or political significance in the society.**
 - Rich heritage and culture is an irreplaceable source of inspiration for its citizens, largely defining **India's global cultural identity.**
- **Reflection of Unity in Diversity:** India is a museum of **different types, communities, customs, traditions, religions, cultures, beliefs, languages, castes and social system.**
 - But even after having so much of external diversity, in Indian culture there is **[Unity in Diversity.](#)**
- **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.
- **Adaptable to Change:** Indian culture has a **unique property of adjustment.** Indian family, caste, religion and institutions have changed themselves with time along with maintaining their **intangible heritage.**
 - Due to adaptability and coordination of Indian culture, **it's continuity, utility and activity is still present.**

What are the Major UNESCO World Natural Heritage Sites in India?

- **Kaziranga National Park:** Home for the rare one-horned rhinoceros,
- **Sundarbans:** Largest contiguous mangrove forest in the world.
- **Valley of Flowers National Park:** Known for its Endemic alpine flowers
- **The Western Ghats:** Famous for its rich biodiversity and Endemism

What are the Issues Related to Heritage Management in India?

- **Lack of Centralised Database for Heritage Sites:** India lacks a complete national level database with state wise distribution of heritage structure.
 - However, [Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage \(INTACH\)](#) has inventoried about 60,000 buildings in around 150 cities which is still only the **tip of the iceberg** as there are **estimated more than 4000 heritage towns and cities in the country.**
- **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.
- **Lack of Centre-State Coordination:** Despite the presence of some of the best conservation and heritage management institutions in India like Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH) , a **multidisciplinary approach to practising heritage conservation is lacking** due to lack of coordination between the **centre and the state.**
- **Prevailing Developmental Activities over Heritage Conservation:** In India, many sites with **rich deposits of archaeological remains have been destroyed** due to developmental activities.
 - Also, lack of provision to conduct a [Cultural Resource Management](#) before developmental projects are taken up on the site.

What are the Related International Conventions to which India is Signatory?

- **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 Should be the Way Forward?

- **Creating National Database of Heritage Sites:** By utilising the collaborative effort initiated by [Indian Space Research Organisation \(ISRO\)](#) and the **Ministry of Culture**, it is possible to collate all **GIS and Non-GIS archaeological databases** into a **Single National Archaeological Database of Heritage Sites of India.**
 - A GIS based centralised database should be mandatory for all exploration and excavation activities.
- **Use of Latest Technologies:** ASI adopted the **Excavation Policy in 2015.** There is a need to update this policy keeping in view the changing scenarios with advancement in technology.
 - New technology like [Photogrammetry](#) & **3D Laser scanning, LiDAR** and [Satellite Remote Sensing Surveys](#) should be used for documentation, surveys, excavation and conservation works.
 - Collaboration with **Foreign Universities for introduction of latest techniques** in exploration and excavations should also be undertaken.
- **Value Based and Scientific Approach:** It is essential that a holistic conservation plan through a multidisciplinary team is prepared following a **value based and scientific approach** before undertaking any conservation works.
 - Need for partnerships with various institutions and organisations for **specialised conservation works** is required to fill in the specific **expertise gap in ASI.**
- **Integrating Heritage-City Planning: Heritage Impact Assessment** of all major infrastructure projects should also be taken into account.
 - Heritage Projects need to be synced with the planning of the city and merge with **typical historic character** in different areas of the city.
- **Heritage Tourism and Education:** By promoting [heritage tourism](#), India can successfully preserve cultural and historic resources while boosting local **economies** by generating jobs, new

businesses and **generating revenue to the governments.**

- There is a need to **create awareness about the heritage resource** and **spread a quest for heritage preservation** among the local population and the visitors.

▪ **Innovative Measures to Increase Engagement:** Monuments that do not attract a large number of visitors and those which have no associated cultural/religious sensitivity should be used as **venues for cultural programmes** with the **twin objectives:**

- Promoting the associated intangible heritage
- Increasing visitor numbers to such sites.

Drishti Mains Question

Despite its vast heritage repository, India's insurmountable heritage remains largely untapped. Critically Analyse.

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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