



## 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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