# Menace of Missing Antiquities in India

**For Prelims:** Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), UNESCO, Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958, Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972.
**For Mains:** Issues Regarding Missing Artefacts, Initiatives Related to Protection of Antiquities.

## Why in News?

There is a formidable gap between **artefact** that has been **"officially" declared missing** and what is **surfacing in global markets** or being found in museum shelves and catalogues.

- Since Independence, **486 antiquities have been reported as missing** from the **3,696 monuments** protected and maintained by the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).**

## What are the Issues Highlighted Regarding Missing Artefacts?

- According to ASI, **292 antiquities have been brought back to India** from abroad since 2014 and 13 between 1976 and 2013.
  - The ASI's list of missing antiquities covers 17 states and two Union Territories. It includes **139** from Madhya Pradesh, **95** from Rajasthan and **86** from Uttar Pradesh.
- The Parliament committee flagged that **"number of antiquities retrieved"** by the ASI from abroad "are not **even the tip of the iceberg in comparison to the huge number of antiques smuggled** out from the country".
- Monuments and sites maintained by the ASI is only a **"small percentage" of the total number of archaeological sites** and monuments across the country.
- The menace of **missing antiquities is also illustrated by** UNESCO. It estimates that **"more than 50,000 art objects** have been **smuggled out of India till 1989".**

## What is Antiquity?

- **About:**
  - The **Antiquities and Art Treasures Act of 1972,** which came into effect on April 1, 1976, defines an **"antiquity" as any object or work of art that has been in existence for at least 100 years.**
    - This includes **coins, sculptures, paintings, epigraphs, detached articles,** and other items that reflect science, art, literature, religion, customs, morals, or politics from a bygone era.
  - For "manuscript, record or other document which is of scientific, historical, literary or aesthetic value", this duration is **"not less than 75 years."**
- **Protection Initiative:**
  - **Indian:**
    - In India, Item-67 of the **Union List,** Item-12 of the **State List,** and Item-40 of the **Concurrent List of the Constitution** deal with the country's heritage.
    - Before Independence, the **Antiquities (Export Control) Act** was passed in April 1947 to ensure that no antiquity could be exported without a license.

- The **[Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act](#)** **was enacted in 1958** to protect ancient monuments and archaeological sites from destruction and misuse.
  - **Global:**
    - **UNESCO** formulated the 1970 **Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.**
    - The **[United Nations Security Council](#)** also passed resolutions in 2015 and 2016 calling for the **protection of cultural heritage sites in conflict zones.**

## What is 'Provenance' of Antiquity?

- **Provenance** includes the list of all owners from the time the object left its maker's possession to the time it was acquired by the current owner.

## What is the Procedure of Bringing Back the Antiquities?

- **Categories:**
  - **Antiquities taken out of India pre-independence;**
  - Antiquities which were taken out **since independence until March 1976;**
  - **Antiquities have been taken out of the country since April 1976.**
- For **Antiquities taken out of India before independence,** requests for their retrieval must be raised bilaterally or on international fora.
  - For example, in **November 2022,** the **Maharashtra government** announced that it was working to bring back the **sword of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj from London.**
- Antiquities in the **second and third categories** can be retrieved easily by **raising an issue bilaterally with proof of ownership** and with the help of the **UNESCO** convention.

### 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)**

**[Source: IE](#)**