

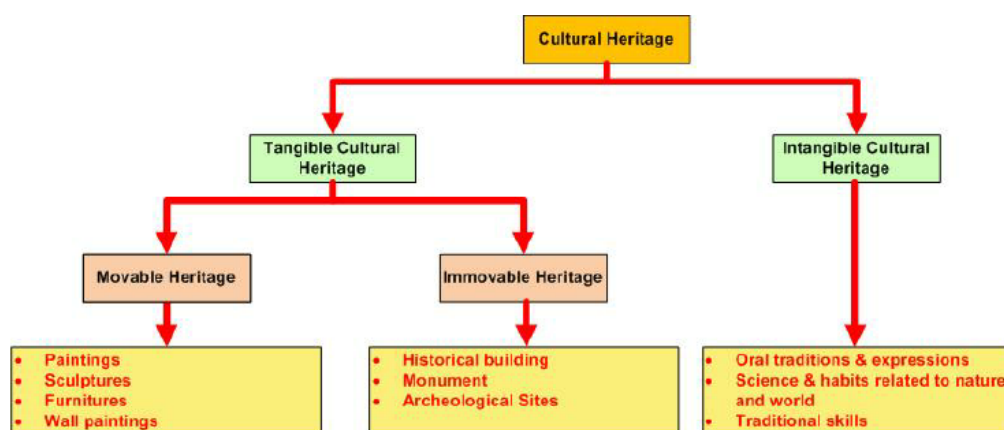
Cultural Property Agreement

Why in news

Recently, India and the US signed the first-ever 'Cultural Property Agreement' during the 46th World Heritage Committee hosted by India.

What is cultural property?

- **Definition** - **UNESCO defines** it as 'cultural property means property which, on religious or secular grounds, is specifically designated by each State as being of importance for archaeology, prehistory, history, literature, art or science.'



- **Illicit trafficking** - Cultural properties are illegally excavated or exported from their country of origin for monetary gain.
- **Impacts of illicit trafficking** - It deprives people of their history and culture, it weakens social cohesion in the long term.
- It fuels organized crime and contributes to the financing of terrorism.
- The black-market trade in cultural property undermines legitimate sales and can harm the economy, particularly for communities dependent on cultural tourism.
- It affects international relations between the countries of origin and destination.
- **Measures** - **1970 UNESCO Convention** on 'Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property'.
- It provides a common framework for the States Parties on the measures to be taken to prohibit and prevent the import, export and transfer of cultural property.
- It is the first international legal framework for the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property.
- Guiding principles are prevention, restitution and international cooperation.
- It has been ratified by 145 states including India in 1977.
- It is fully in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) defined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

What is Cultural Property Agreement?

- **Historical background** - It is culmination of year-long bilateral discussions and negotiations held on the sidelines of the G20 culture working group meetings.
- It was negotiated by the state department under US law implementing the 1970 UNESCO Convention.
- **Umbrella convention** - This agreement is aligned with the under **Article 9 of 1970 UNESCO Convention**, both India and US are signatories to the convention.
- **Objectives** - It aims to prevent the illicit trafficking of antiquities and retrieval of antiquarian objects to their place of origin.
- It is to facilitate the quick seizure of Indian antiquities at US Customs and ensure their smooth repatriation to India.
- **Provisions** - It restricts the importation into the US of certain
 - Archaeological material ranging in date from 1.7 million years ago through 1770 CE
 - Ethnological material including categories of civic, religious
 - Royal architectural material
 - Religious material and ceremonial items
 - Manuscripts ranging in from 2nd century BCE to 1947 CE
- The list of items restricted for import in the US will be promulgated by the Government of the US.
- US shall offer to return to India any object or material on the Designate List forfeited to the Government of US.
- **Repatriated articles** - It is not clear where these repatriated artefacts will be situated once returned.
- Most of them would be sent back to the states to which they belong with a “possibility” of having a “special section or a museum” for the repatriated artefacts.
- **Significance** - It is a “ground breaking endorsement” of “culture as a standalone goal” in the post-2020 development framework in the New Delhi’s Leaders’ Declaration (NDLD).
- It is step towards securing India’s rich and diverse cultural heritage and invaluable artefacts of our grand history.
- It ensures justice and also paves a way for connecting India with the world to show India’s rich culture and history.

India joins the ranks of 29 existing US bilateral cultural property agreement partners.

- It is aligned with the Prime Ministers' vision of 'Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi' and the Viksit Bharat Vision 2047.
- **Aims** - To foster vibrant and inclusive ecosystems, unlock new pathways of growth and sustainability and transform our economies and societies while preserving our cultural heritage.
- **Role** - It offers a blueprint for leveraging heritage and creativity for the greater good, benefiting not just India but the entire world by promoting cross-cultural understanding and sustainable development.
- **Culture of repatriation** - In the past decade, preserving Indian artifacts and cultural heritage has become a pivotal aspect of India's foreign policy.
- If an antiquity is located abroad, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) coordinates with the foreign country for its recovery and it has retrieved 357 antiquities from the year 1976.
 - India has repatriated 358 antiquities since 1976, with 345 returned since 2014, mostly from the US.
 - In the last five years, India has repatriated a total, 15 from the UK, and 35 from Australia and one from Italy.
- **Importance of repatriation** - It nurture cultural stewardship, promote tourism, and stimulate economic growth within local communities.
- It empowers nations to leverage their cultural assets for educational enrichment, social cohesion, and economic empowerment, thereby fostering inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

To know about India's measures in Antiquity protection, click [here](#)

References

1. [The Indian Express | India-US Signed Cultural Property Agreement](#)
2. [PIB| India's Cultural Creative Economy](#)