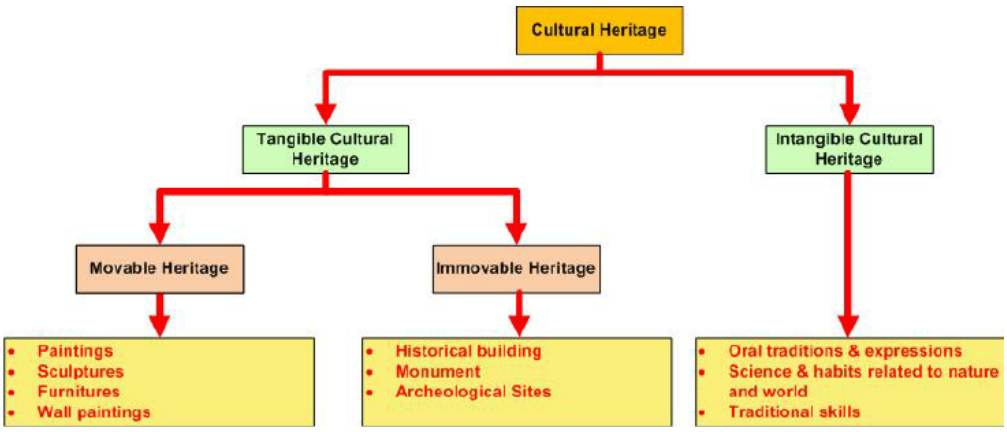
Cultural Property Agreement

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 p*rohibit 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.

India's Cultural Creative Economy

• 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

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