India’s Heritage Economic Potential

What is the issue?

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Despite having a plethora of historical monuments in India, historical monuments are both **not legally protected and economically leveraged.**

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What is the current status of heritage sites?

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- Each region of our subcontinent boasts of monumental buildings and remarkable archaeology.
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- Yet, less than 15,000 monuments and heritage structures are legally protected in India, a fraction of the 600,000 protected in the UK.
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- Even those structures considered to be of national/state or local importance in India remain under threat from urban pressures, neglect, vandalism and, worse, demolition, only for the value of the land they stand upon.
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- This poor state of preservation of a large part of our national heritage is a result of the inability of those entrusted with their care and management.
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How can monuments be made attractive?

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- Our built heritage can be **leveraged for economic gain through tourism dollars** as well as **opportunities for craftsmen and local communities.**
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- The first step towards this would be to ensure that visits to monuments and archaeological sites are exciting for visitors.
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- It is required, even for sites such as the Taj Mahal, that the cultural context

and intangible heritage music, food, ritual, sport, festivals, etc., associated with the sites be explained to the visitor.
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- **Cultural events** that would usually attract large numbers **should be organized** at less visited monuments.
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- Heritage enthusiasts encouraged to buy **annual passes** that allow unlimited repeat visits.
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- Funds spent on introducing such measures and facilities will quickly yield rich dividends.
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- **Liberalization of the cultural sector** needs to be brought in and responsibility needs to be entrusted to private entities, universities, non-profits, even resident welfare associations for better preservation of monuments.
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- Heritage buildings everywhere utilize local materials; the skills to work upon these are in the local communities. Thus any conservation effort then has to **source locally** creating employment and economic opportunities.
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- Many an Indian ruler commissioned forts, palaces and temples in times of drought as a life-saving economic incentive for the populace.
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- **"Make in India" objectives** will thus be met by any well planned and implemented conservation effort while simultaneously creating an economic asset that continues to pay rich dividends.
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- Most of the 600,000 protected heritage structures in the UK are in **private ownership,** a similar arrangement can be made in India also.
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- **Property tax waivers,** permission for change of land use and transferable development rights are amongst other incentives owners of heritage buildings or those residing within the 100m "prohibited zones" of nationally protected monuments could receive.
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- Besides being used as hotels or museums or libraries, heritage buildings could also easily be adapted to serve as schools or clinics lending economic value to local communities.
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- While representing a higher aesthetic and building quality, it is always more economical to convert a building than to build afresh.
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How conservation works needs to be?

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- Conservation works need to be **coupled with urban improvements,** better transport infrastructure, providing economic opportunities, and improving health, education and sanitation infrastructure.
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- Conservationists have often expected local communities to contribute towards the conservation effort while not offering any incentives and imposing heavy restrictions. Such an approach is never likely to succeed.
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- One of the world's most frequently cited conservation success stories has resulted from the non-profit partnership established by the **Aga Khan Trust for Culture** with the ASI, Central Public Works Department and the South Delhi Municipal Corporation in the Capital's Humayun's Tomb-Nizamuddin area.
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- Here, over a 10-year period, conservation works have been undertaken on over 40 structures, leading to a **tenfold increase in visitor numbers** and the doubling of the number of World Heritage Sites; they now number 11, in addition to Humayun's Tomb.
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- The Aga Khan Trust has assisted the ASI in taking ownership of an additional 35 acres of land, freeing it from encroachment and implementing landscape restoration at the monuments.
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- With conservation work requiring 500,000 days of work for craftsmen, there is a strong case for making conservation works eligible for MGNREGA funds.
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- As a result of this partnership project, **over 20,000 people inhabiting the adjoining Nizamuddin Basti today have an improved quality of life.**
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- It also resulted in street improvement, landscaping of neighbourhood parks, building of community toilet complexes, improved primary education and the provision of widely-used health facilities.
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- The emphasis of the Sufi cultural legacy through cultural performances and exhibitions has also instilled a sense of pride in the local community.
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- Providing appropriate vocational training has meant thousands of jobs and economic opportunities in selling souvenirs crafted by the women in

Nizamuddin.
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- Just as anywhere else in the world, our built heritage can be leveraged for economic gain through tourism dollars as well as opportunities for craftsmen and local communities.
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Source: Live Mint

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