Protection and Conservation of Monuments in India

Mains: *GS I – Art and Culture*

Why in News?

In recent years, India has adopted a more integrated and forward-looking approach to heritage conservation—linking preservation with tourism, livelihoods and cultural diplomacy.

What are the tangible and intangible cultural heritage?

- **Tangible Cultural Heritage –** It includes monuments, archaeological sites and cultural landscapes of outstanding universal value.
- Globally recognised examples include the Taj Mahal and the Sanchi Stupa.
- In India, such heritage is protected under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958.
- This law empowers the government to declare monuments as protected, regulate construction in surrounding areas, and ensure scientific conservation through the Archaeological Survey of India.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)** – It refers to living traditions such as performing arts, rituals, festivals and traditional knowledge systems.
- Practices like Yoga, Vedic chanting and Buddhist chanting in Ladakh are examples.
- India safeguards ICH under the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), supported by constitutional provisions like Article 29.

What are the Constitutional and legal frameworks for monument conservation?

- **Article 49 of Indian constitution –** Article 49 mandates the State to protect monuments and objects of national importance.
- It forms the constitutional basis for legislation like the AMASR Act, 1958.
- **Seventh Schedule – Division of Responsibilities –** The Constitution clearly demarcates responsibilities:
- Union List (Entry 67): Monuments of national importance under the Central Government
- State List (Entry 12): Other monuments under State Governments
- This ensures coordinated governance across levels.
- **Article 51A (f) – Fundamental Duty –** Citizens are obligated to preserve India's cultural heritage, reinforcing conservation as a shared responsibility.



- **National Policy for Conservation (2014) –** This policy guides scientific preservation, emphasising minimal intervention, authenticity, use of traditional materials, and integration of modern techniques.
- It also promotes documentation, research, and community participation while balancing conservation with public access.

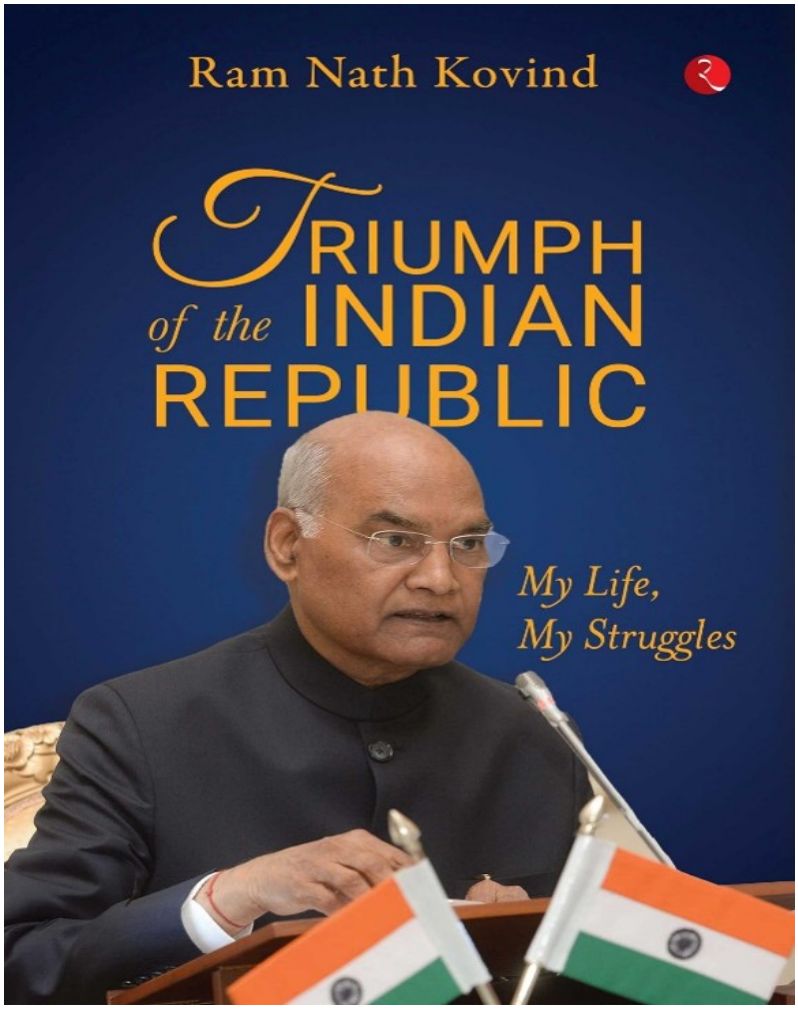
What are the institutional framework?

- **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) –** The Archaeological Survey of India, established in 1861, is the principal body for heritage conservation in India.
- Functioning under the Ministry of Culture, it protects over 3,600 centrally protected monuments.
- Its key functions include:
  - Structural and chemical conservation
  - Archaeological excavations and research
  - Maintenance of site museums
  - Epigraphy and documentation
- ASI operates through regional Circles for decentralised management. Conservation work includes structural repairs, preventive measures, and use of traditional materials.
- In 2024–25, approximately ₹374 crore was allocated for conservation efforts.
- **National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA) –** Established in 2007, NMMA supports ASI by creating a national database of heritage assets.
- It has documented over 11,000 heritage sites and more than 12 lakh antiquities, aiding planning and prioritisation.

What are the Emerging Approaches to Conservation?

- **Comprehensive Conservation and Livelihood Linkages –** India increasingly views heritage as an economic resource.
- The “Adopt a Heritage 2.0” programme exemplifies this approach by involving private partners in improving visitor amenities while ASI retains conservation control.

- Sites such as the Agra Fort, Qutub Minar, and Ajanta Caves have benefited from improved infrastructure.
- This has led to increased tourism, employment generation, and growth of local crafts and services.
- Cultural festivals further strengthen this linkage:
    - Konark Dance Festival
    - Khajuraho Dance Festival
- These events promote tourism while supporting local economies.
- **Museum Development and Digitisation –** The Museum Grant Scheme supports modernisation, digitisation and capacity building in museums.
- Digital catalogues, improved displays and conservation labs enhance both preservation and accessibility.
- **Technology-Supported Conservation –** Technology is transforming heritage conservation in India.

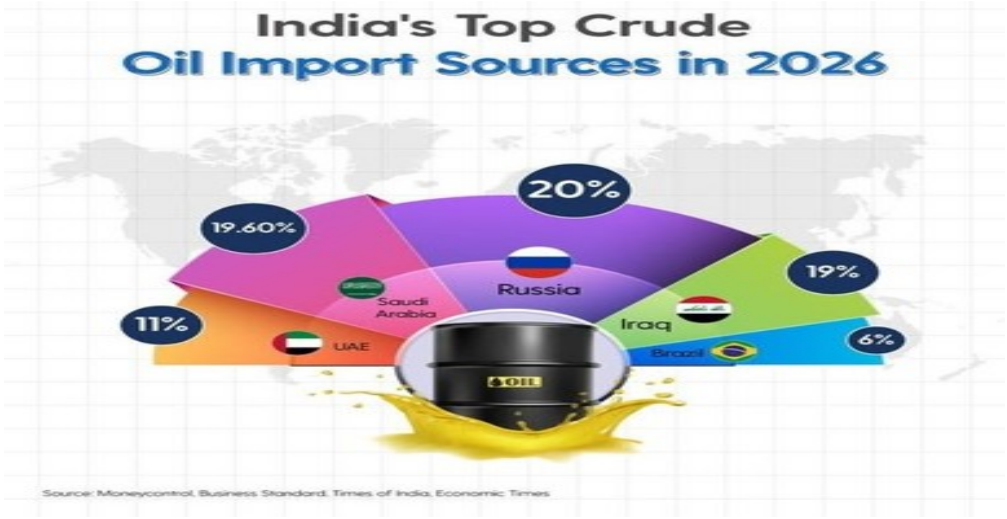


- Modern tools enhance documentation, monitoring and restoration:
    - **3D Laser Scanning** – High-precision mapping of structures
    - **Photogrammetry** – Detailed visual documentation
    - **Drone Surveys** – Aerial mapping and monitoring
    - **GIS Mapping** – A nalysis of environmental and urban pressures
- Artificial Intelligence is also being used for digitising manuscripts and organising cultural data, improving accessibility.

Case Study: Kedarnath Temple Restoration

• The restoration of the Kedarnath Temple after the 2013 disaster highlights India's scientific approach to conservation.
• The ASI collaborated with experts from Indian Institute of Technology Madras to conduct geotechnical assessments. Techniques like Multi-Channel Analysis of Surface Waves (MASW) were used to evaluate structural stability.
• The restoration combined:
  - Scientific diagnostics
  - Non-invasive strengthening methods
  - Traditional materials and craftsmanship

- **Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) –** The "Adopt a Heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan" initiative (2017), revamped in 2023, encourages corporate participation through CSR.
- Private entities, designated as "Monument Mitras," handle:
  - Cleanliness and amenities
  - Signage and accessibility
  - Visitor services
- However, conservation remains solely under ASI. This model improves visitor experience while ensuring preservation standards.
- **Digital Platforms and Public Engagement –** The Indian Culture Portal (https://www.indianculture.gov.in) is a major digital initiative that integrates content from museums, archives and libraries.
- Features include:
  - Virtual walkthroughs (e.g., heritage sites like Shaniwar Wada)
  - 360-degree tours (e.g., Qutub Minar complex)
  - Interactive educational content
  - This enhances accessibility and public engagement with heritage.
- **Global Recognition: UNESCO World Heritage –** India's global cultural presence has grown significantly.
- With 44 World Heritage Sites, including recent additions like the Maratha Military Landscapes (2024), India ranks among the top countries in heritage listings under UNESCO.
- These include:
  - **36** Cultural Sites
  - **7** Natural Sites
  - **1** Mixed Site
- This recognition reflects India's diverse and rich heritage.



What lies ahead?

- India’s approach to monument conservation has evolved into a holistic and dynamic framework.
- It combines constitutional mandates, strong institutions like the Archaeological Survey of India, scientific techniques, and participatory models.
- The integration of technology, digitisation, and public-private partnerships has strengthened conservation efforts while enhancing accessibility and economic potential.
- Heritage is no longer viewed merely as a legacy of the past but as a living resource that contributes to identity, development and global engagement.
- Going forward, sustained investment, community participation and innovation will be essential to ensure that India’s rich cultural heritage is preserved, protected and meaningfully integrated into its future trajectory.

Reference

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