

1. Heritage Management & Conservation – History

The government plans to open up conservation of protected monuments – so far, the mandate of only the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) – to private entities, marking the beginning of a public-private partnership model in heritage management.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) – Exclusive Mandate and Institutional Framework

Establishment and Mandate

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was established in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham and functions under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. It is the apex institution for archaeological research, exploration, excavation, conservation, and preservation of India's tangible cultural heritage. ASI enforces two key legislations – the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, and the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972. It is responsible for maintaining and preserving around 3,700 Monuments of National Importance (MNI) across the country.

Organizational Structure and Specialized Branches

Decentralized Functional Structure – ASI operates through 37 Regional Circles, each led by a Superintending Archaeologist overseeing fieldwork, conservation, documentation, and research within their jurisdiction. Each Circle coordinates with local authorities and state governments to implement conservation and awareness programs.

Specialized Divisions

Science Branch – Conducts chemical analysis, material testing, and conservation of artifacts and monuments.

Horticulture Branch – Maintains and restores historical gardens surrounding monuments, enhancing ecological and aesthetic appeal.

Underwater Archaeology Wing – Explores submerged sites such as ancient ports, shipwrecks, and coastal settlements.

Temple Survey Projects – Records and analyses temple architecture, sculptures, and inscriptions for historical documentation.

Epigraphy Branch – Studies and deciphers ancient inscriptions that provide valuable insights into India's past.

Policy Evolution in Heritage Conservation

Conservation Challenge under Sole ASI Control – ASI's exclusive control over all national monuments led to administrative bottlenecks and limited capacity to manage a vast and diverse cultural heritage. Constraints in manpower, funding, and technical expertise caused delays in restoration and maintenance of several sites. The expanding number of monuments and complex conservation demands called for a more collaborative and resource-diverse approach.

Shift towards Collaborative Heritage Management – The government initiated a shift from ASI's single-agency approach to a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, aiming to infuse new resources and expertise while keeping ASI as the supervisory authority.

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) Model for Heritage Conservation

Core Objectives – To enhance technical and financial capacity in heritage conservation through private participation. To accelerate project completion timelines and reduce bureaucratic delays. To uphold quality and accountability by ensuring ASI's continuous supervision. To promote wider public and corporate participation in national heritage protection.

Supervision and Policy Compliance – All projects under the PPP framework must comply with the National Policy for Conservation of Ancient Monuments, Archaeological Sites and Remains (2014). The ASI remains the approving and monitoring authority, ensuring adherence to conservation ethics and scientific methods.

Framework and Implementation Mechanism

Role of the National Culture Fund (NCF) – The National Culture Fund (NCF), established in 1996, serves as the financial channel for all heritage conservation projects. It began with a ₹20 crore corpus contributed

by the Government of India. The NCF framework allows corporate and individual donors to fund specific projects directly. Contributions made through NCF are eligible for 100% tax exemption under CSR provisions of the Companies Act, 2013. This mechanism ensures transparency, proper fund utilization, and recognition of donor contributions.

Empanelment of Conservation Architects – The Ministry of Culture issues a Request for Proposal (RFP) to empanel qualified conservation architects with experience in heritage restoration. Donors can select architects from this approved panel to guide their conservation initiatives. The architect and donor jointly engage external implementing agencies that have prior experience in restoring structures over a century old. A Detailed Project Report (DPR) is prepared for each conservation project and must be approved by the ASI. This model ensures that ASI retains its supervisory authority while private players take up the execution role.

Track Record and Achievements of the National Culture Fund

Funding and Project Milestones – Since its creation, the NCF has mobilized over ₹140 crore in donations from corporate and public sector contributors. It has supported over 100 projects that combine conservation with community engagement and tourism development.

Notable Completed Projects

Bhuleshwar Temple (Pune) – Structural restoration and consolidation.

British Residency (Hyderabad) – Architectural conservation and adaptive reuse.

Monuments at Mandu (Madhya Pradesh) – Stabilization and landscape restoration.

Purana Qila and Red Fort (New Delhi) – Conservation of fortifications and environmental management.

Ongoing Projects

Deobaloda, Bhilai (Chhattisgarh) – Funded by SAIL–Bhilai Steel Plant.

Kala Amb (Panipat) and **Singorgarh Fort (Madhya Pradesh)** – Supported by Indian Oil Corporation.

Vikramshila Excavated Remains (Bihar) – Funded by NTPC Limited.

Checks, Balances, and Eligibility Criteria

Quality and Compliance Assurance – Only qualified and empanelled conservation architects are permitted to undertake projects. Implementing agencies must demonstrate prior expertise in restoring heritage structures aged over 100 years. Projects must conform to the National Policy for Conservation (2014) and international standards like the Venice Charter (1964) and ICOMOS guidelines.

Prioritization and Project Selection – The government will release a list of 250 monuments identified for urgent conservation needs. Donors can choose from this list or propose additional sites of cultural or regional importance, subject to ASI approval.

Benefits and Implications

For Corporate Donors – Opportunity for direct participation in preserving India's heritage. Eligibility for CSR tax deductions and public recognition through signage and official acknowledgments.

Enhancement of corporate image and social responsibility profile.

For the Heritage Sector – Increased funding for heritage conservation. Expanded technical capacity through private-sector expertise. Faster project implementation and reduced maintenance backlog. Higher accountability and transparency through public-private collaboration.

Comparative Perspective – From 'Adopt a Heritage' to PPP Conservation

'Adopt a Heritage' Scheme – Previously, corporates acted as Monument Mitras, focusing on developing tourist amenities such as restrooms, cafeterias, ticketing systems, and signboards. The focus was primarily on improving visitor experience rather than conservation of the monument structure itself.

PPP Model's Policy Advancement – The new PPP framework goes beyond the Adopt a Heritage approach by allowing private entities to engage directly in core conservation and restoration work. This marks a significant policy shift towards shared responsibility and expertise-based management of cultural assets.

Constitutional and Legal Framework

Division of Responsibilities

Union List (Entry 67) – Parliament governs monuments and archaeological sites of national importance.

State List (Entry 12) – States manage monuments not declared of national importance by Parliament.

Concurrent List (Entry 40) – Both Union and States can legislate on archaeological sites not covered by national declarations.

Article 253 – International Commitments – Authorizes Parliament to make laws for implementing international treaties, conventions, or decisions, even if the subject lies in the State List. Empowers India to fulfill its commitments under UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention and other cultural agreements.

Broader Significance and Outlook – The PPP-based heritage conservation framework represents a modernized approach to cultural governance that blends state oversight with private innovation and financing. It reinforces India's soft power and cultural diplomacy by safeguarding monuments that symbolize national identity. The initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 11.4, which emphasizes protecting and safeguarding cultural and natural heritage. By promoting accountability, technical quality, and inclusiveness, this model aims to make India's heritage management resilient, participatory, and globally benchmarked.

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