

4. Adopt a Heritage project and Monument Mitras: The Scrutiny

Prelims Syllabus: Governance

Mains Syllabus: GS-I Art & Culture



Why in News?

- Businesses that enter agreements with ASI to adopt sites are going to be known as Monument Mitras. The tenfold increase in the number of sites being brought under the ambit of the controversial 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme of 2017 raises concerns. Unless the 'revamped' scheme is suspended, the nation's precious pluralistic heritage stands at the threshold of obliteration.

Adopt a Heritage project:

- **Initiative of Ministry of Tourism:** The 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme was launched by the Indian government in September 2017 under the aegis of the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Culture, and Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- **Objective:** The main objective of the scheme is to provide world class tourist facilities at the various natural/cultural heritage sites, monuments and other tourist sites to make them tourist friendly, enhance their tourist potential and cultural importance in a planned and phased manner across the country.
- **Primary focus:** The project primarily focuses on providing basic amenities that include cleanliness, public convenience, drinking water, ease of access for tourists, signage etc. and advanced amenities like TFC, Souvenir shop, Cafeteria etc.

- **Monument Mitra:** The public, private sector companies and individuals will develop tourist amenities at heritage sites. They would become 'Monument Mitra' and adopt the sites essentially under their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity.

What are the concerns?

- **Current plan side-lines the ASI mandate:** The current plan also side-lines the mandate of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and abandons The Sarnath Initiative, guidelines devised by the ASI, the Getty Trust, U.S., the British Museum, and National Culture Fund to safe keep excavated objects and present them to visitors in an engaging manner.
- **Undermine local communities and their relationships with historical sites:** Guided tours led by employees of large businesses who have received permission to adopt a monument may endanger livelihoods of those who have lived near the site and made a living by regaling visitors with stories of its colourful past.
- **Excessive wear and tear:** The potential of big businesses to underwrite a monument's illumination is also troubling. Night tourism will also pull electricity away from rural homesteads and hospitals.
- **It may alter historical character of monuments which are not under ASI:** There are some monuments selected for the scheme that are not protected by the ASI and are in States without Archaeology Directorates. One fears that businesses that sign agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to adopt these monuments will be able to alter their historical character without much opposition.

What might Corporate India instead do to look after the nation's-built heritage?

- **Businesses can help citizens understand why monuments matter:** This can be done by earmarking CSR funds for grants for researching, writing, and publishing high quality textbooks, and developing imaginative and effective ways of teaching history.
- **For instance:** Corporates might also follow the lead taken by Sudha Murthy and N.R. Narayana Murthy in giving gifts to organizations such as the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune to continue their missions of writing history by rationally coordinating the textual record and the archaeological evidence.

- **Skillful conservation:** Industrial houses can support the meaningful conservation of heritage buildings by looking within. Their CSR funds can be used to purchase new equipment that release fewer noxious gases that darken and corrode marble buildings and discharge fewer effluents into rivers, thus making these water bodies less likely to serve as breeding grounds of microbes that gather on the walls of ancient buildings erected on riverbanks and cause their decay.
- **For instance:** In the past, Tata Sons, ONGC, and other companies have regularly contributed funds to organisations training individuals in much needed restoration skills and creating jobs for them.
- **Collaborative efforts:** The private sector's resources and expertise may also help the ASI and State Archaeology Directorates to secure monuments from dams, mining projects, defacement, and looting.

Climate change: Significant threat to India's historical monuments

- **Sanchi Stupa:** The 3rd-century BC Buddhist monument in Madhya Pradesh is facing a threat from increasing rainfall and humidity. The stone is deteriorating due to the changes in weather patterns, leading to the loss of carvings and sculptures.
- **Mahabalipuram Monuments:** The 7th-century rock-cut monuments in Tamil Nadu are facing a threat from sea-level rise and erosion. The monuments, which are located close to the shore, are being battered by the waves, leading to the loss of sculptures and carvings.
- **Sun Temple, Konark:** The 13th-century temple, made of Khondalite stone, is facing a threat from rising temperatures and humidity. The stone is expanding and contracting due to the changes in temperature, leading to cracks and erosion.
- **Hampi Monuments:** The 14th-century monuments in Karnataka are facing a threat from heavy rainfall and flooding. The monuments, which are made of granite, are being eroded by the rainwater, leading to the loss of carvings and sculptures.
- **Rajasthan's Shekhawati's murals:** Shekhawati is known for its beautifully painted havelis with intricate frescoes and murals. Greater fluctuations in temperature are peeling away Shekhawati's murals.
- **Ladakh's stucco houses:** Higher rainfall is leading Ladakh's stucco houses to crumble. The traditional way of building houses in Ladakh is under threat due to climate change, which is affecting the durability of the structures.

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- **Taj Mahal:** The monument built in the 17th century, is facing a threat from rising pollution and changing weather patterns. The white marble is turning yellow due to air pollution.
 - **Sea forts in Maharashtra:** Rising sea levels are leading to water percolation into forts along Maharashtra's coast. Salination is eating into their foundations.

Conclusion:

- Currently, India's progress in diverse fields is being projected at G-20 events across the nation. By embracing forward-thinking principles of historical preservation, businesses, government agencies, and civil society groups can showcase India's genuine progress in this arena. Maybe their efforts will inspire more citizens to participate in the pressing task of safeguarding India's pluralistic heritage.

