

India's Cultural Heritage:

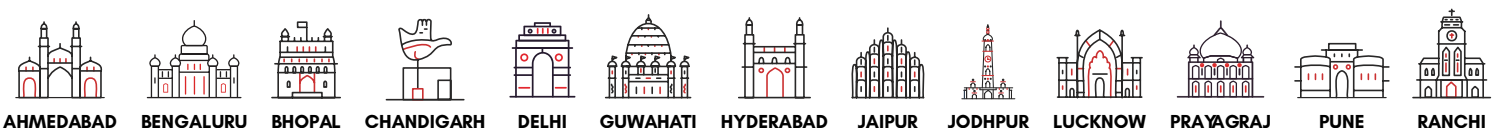
PRESERVING THE PAST, INSPIRING THE FUTURE



India, often described as a subcontinent within a country, has a **cultural heritage that is both rich and diverse**. This heritage reflects the country's deep and varied history. From the ancient Indus Valley Civilization to the vibrant culture of today, India's story is one of **blended traditions, beliefs, and arts, shaped by its many ethnic groups and religions**. Each cultural artefact in India is a piece of the country's collective memory, **connecting the present to the past**. However, in today's globalized world, preserving this heritage comes with challenges. Efforts to conserve and interpret cultural artefacts must keep pace with the pressures of modernization. Despite these challenges, India's cultural legacy continues to be a source of unity and strength, transcending the bounds of time.

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I. What is cultural heritage?

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, objects, artistic expressions and values.

UNESCO defines **Cultural Heritage as 'both a product and a process**, which provides societies with a wealth of resources that are **inherited from the past**, created in the present and bestowed for the benefit of future generations'.

Types of Cultural Heritage

The cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples is considered in two ways i.e. tangible and intangible. Both aspects are strongly interconnected to each other, and to Country (broadly or specific to a place).

- **Tangible Cultural Heritage:** refers to physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society.
 - It includes artistic creations, built heritage such as buildings and monuments, and other physical or tangible products of human creativity.
 - For e.g. Hill forts of Rajasthan, Sun temple, etc.
- **Intangible Cultural Heritage:** indicates the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith.
 - For e.g. The tradition of Vedic chanting, Ramlila, Kumbh Mela, etc.

Figure 1 UNESCO identified tangible World heritage sites in India

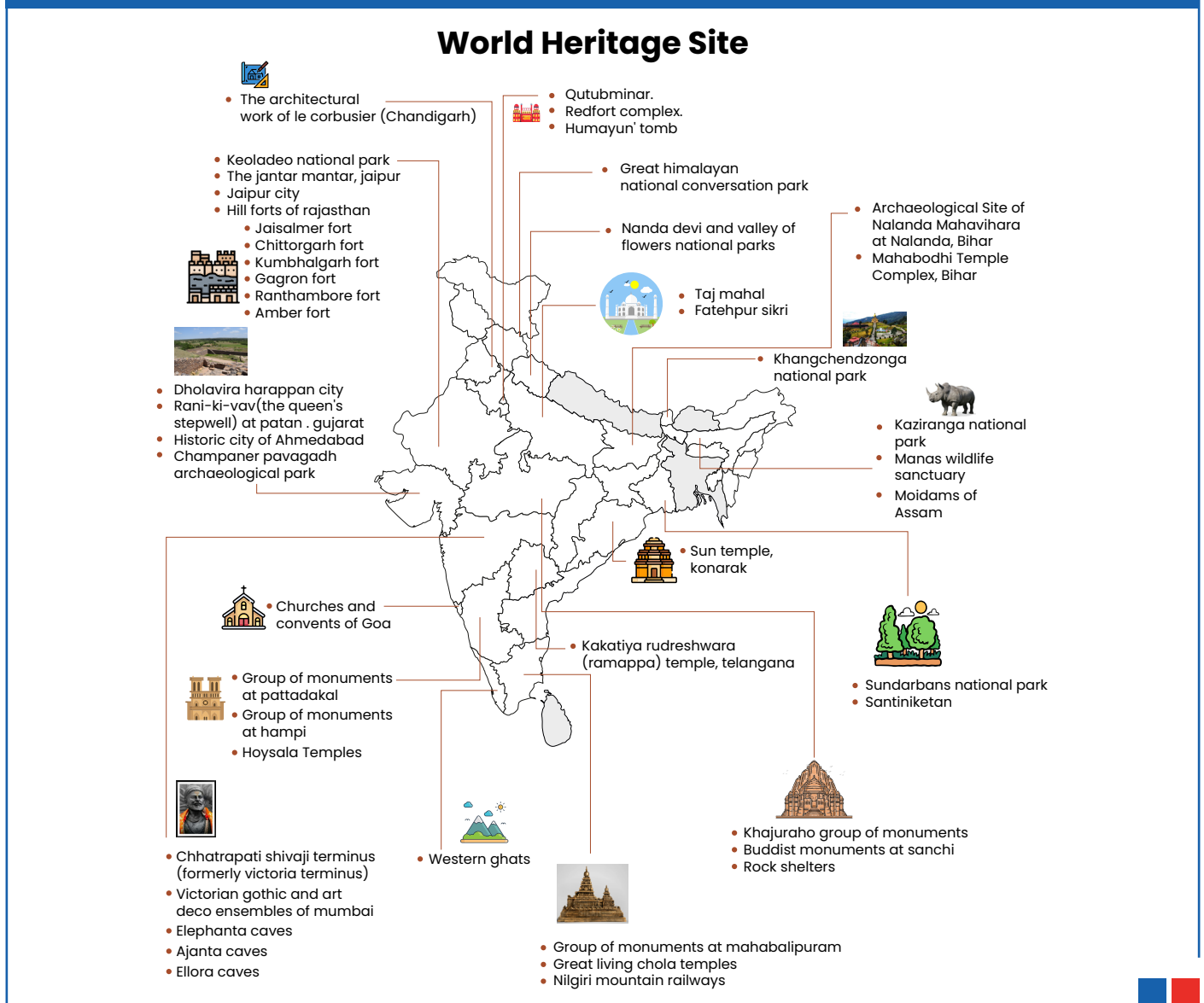


Figure-2 List of UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritages in India



Ram Lila



Kumbh Mela



Chhau dance



Vedic Chanting



Koodiyattam



Ramman



Mudi yettu



Kalbelia



Buddhist Chanting from Ladakh



Sankirtanas



Traditional brass and copper craft of utensil making in Punjab



Yoga



Persian New Year Nawrouz



Garbha

2. What are the key elements of India's cultural heritage?

India's cultural heritage is not only one of the most ancient but it is also one of the most extensive and varied. Due to its rich and precious Cultural and Natural heritages, India is came to be known as the land of great wonders and diversities. The key elements of India's cultural heritage are

- **Indian Knowledge Systems:** It comprises of Jnan, Vignan, and Jeevan Darshan that have evolved out of experience, observation, experimentation, and rigorous analysis. For E.g., Yoga, Ayurveda, etc.
- **Indian folk culture:** It is vibrant mixture of traditions, art forms, and customs passed down through generations continuously from Indus Valley Civilization.
 - It encompasses diverse regional practices, including intricate handicrafts, and lively music and dance. For e.g., Lavani dance of Maharashtra, Madhubani painting of Bihar, etc.
- **Art and Architecture:** India is rich in traditions of **painting, sculpture, literature, and poetry** which continue to thrive.
- India boasts a rich architectural heritage with a blend of ancient and modern structures. Iconic landmarks like the **Taj Mahal, Qutub Minar, Jaipur's palaces,** and ancient temples like **Khajuraho and Ellora showcase** India's architectural prowess.
- **Festivals:** India is a land of festivals, and there is always a **celebration taking place somewhere in the country for e.g. hornbill festival.**
- **Religious Diversity:** India, the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, also hosts significant Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and other religious populations.
- **Languages and Scripts:** India is a linguistically diverse nation with over 1,600 languages spoken. The Constitution recognizes **22 official languages.** Each state has its own official language(s).

➤ **Social and cultural practices:** India is unlike any other major civilization in its complexity and diversity; in fact, it is more akin to a region as diverse as Europe than a nation-state.

➤ **Rituals related to marriage, birth, death,** and religious ceremonies are different in different part of India.

Box 2.1 In Conversation! Meaning of Living Heritage



Vinay



Vini

Hey Vinay, I was reading about the **concept of 'living heritage'** in Indian culture and I found it really fascinating. Have you heard about it before?

Living heritage? No, I don't think I'm familiar with that term. What does it refer to?

Living heritage is a **way of understanding cultural heritage** that goes beyond just physical monuments and artefacts.

Ohh, I have never heard about it.

It recognizes that **culture is a dynamic, ever-evolving process** that is constantly being **shaped and reshaped by the people** who practice it.

Ah I see, that's an interesting perspective. Can you give me some examples of what living heritage might look like in the Indian context?

Sure, let me give you a few. It's about the **rituals we observe, the festivals we celebrate, the languages we speak, the food we eat** – all of these things are part of our living heritage.

That makes a lot of sense. I can imagine how something like a traditional dance form or a regional cuisine would be considered living heritage, as they're **passed down and evolve over generations.**

That's a great example. They're not just relics of the past – they're vibrant and relevant parts of our culture that continue to thrive and evolve.

3. What is the role of India's cultural heritage in national development?

Understanding our cultural heritage gives us a better sense of our personal identity. It plays an essential role in our society by linking the past, the present and the future generation, as a basis for building a strong nation and national identity. Main role played by cultural heritage are:

➤ **Social Cohesion and Identity:**

- Cultural heritage binds people together, fostering a sense of **shared identity and belonging** as it transcends regional, linguistic, and religious boundaries,
 - » For e.g., **the tradition of "Aarti,"** a Hindu ritual of worship involving the offering of light to deities, is performed daily in temples across India.

➤ **Economic Impact:**

- **Heritage economics** is an evolving field with **enormous potential** in terms of **sustainable development**.
 - » Heritage items, such as historic buildings, are **classified as cultural capital** as they may not only have a potential sale price as real estate, but also have other significance that cannot be expressed in monetary terms, such as an ancient engineering concept.
- **Job Creation:** Heritage-related services, such as guided tours, restoration, and cultural events, create employment opportunities.
 - » **For e.g.,** Iconic heritage sites like the **Taj Mahal, Ajanta Caves, and Khajuraho Group of Monuments** attract millions of visitors annually.
- **Craftsmanship, handlooms, and indigenous arts** generate **employment and income** for artisans and communities.
 - » For e.g., **Toy industry is a labour-oriented industry** based on master craftsmanship and creative designing.

- **Cultural exports,** including music, dance, and handicrafts, enhance India's global presence and **contribute to foreign exchange earnings.**

- **Education and Innovation:** Ancient texts like the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita offer profound knowledge and ethics, while Yoga and Ayurveda provide holistic health.

- Cultural heritage fosters creativity, innovation, and interdisciplinary thinking.

- **Environmental Conservation:** India's cultural heritage, intertwined with natural landscapes like the Ellora Caves, Sundarbans National Park and Sacred groves, promotes ecosystem protection and embeds sustainable practices in traditions.

- **Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** **The G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration** highlights **culture's role in achieving SDGs.** Artists, through movements like **Delhi's street art** movement, raise awareness and drive social change on climate, waste, and gender issues.

➤ **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:**

- **Culture acts as a cohesive agent for growth** and development in international relations. Two Indian philosophies, viz. **Vasudhaiva Kutumbhakam** and **Atithi Devo Bhava,** have always been part of Indian traditions.
- **Cultural exchanges** and Initiatives like the **International Day of Yoga** exemplify India's cultural influence.

Box 3.1 How has globalization impacted India's cultural heritage?

Globalisation refers to the **phenomenon of the opening up of economies and borders.** Globalization has had both positive and negative impacts on India's cultural heritage.

➤ **Positive Impact:**

- **Cultural Exchange and Diversity:** It has facilitated the exchange of ideas, cultural practices, and artistic expressions, leading to a **more cosmopolitan and diverse cultural landscape.**
- **Global Recognition and Appreciation:** Traditional art forms, such as classical dance, music, and handicrafts, have **found audiences beyond India's borders,** fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation.

➤ **Negative Impact:**

- **Commercialization and Commodification:** Traditional crafts and rituals are sometimes mass-produced for commercial purposes, diluting their authenticity and diminishing their cultural significance.
- **Rapid urbanization and development driven by globalization** can overshadow historical sites and traditional settlements, leading to the destruction or degradation of heritage structures and landscapes.
- **Cultural erosion:** The influence of Western popular culture and the potential erosion of traditional practices.

Balancing the preservation of cultural heritage with the opportunities and challenges of globalization remains an on-going endeavour.



4. What are the Government Initiatives for heritage conservation and Cultural Revival?

The Government is combining development with heritage preservation, instilling a deeper sense of history in the younger generation. The government is focusing on cultivating an appreciation for India's civilizational heritage, that will foster a transformative shift in society. Major government initiatives are

Cultural Heritage Conservation and Promotion:

- **The Kashi Culture Pathway**, adopted at the G20 Culture Ministerial Meeting in 2023, addresses threats to cultural heritage.
- **New Institution:** The government has decided to set up **'Indian Institute of Heritage' at Noida** to focus on conservation and research in India's rich tangible heritage.
- **The PRASAD Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) and HRIDAY scheme (Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana)** aims to develop and beautify pilgrimage destinations and to preserve and revitalise the heritage cities of India.
- **Under the Swadesh Darshan Scheme:** 15 themes have been identified for developing theme based circuits in which one theme is Heritage Circuit such as Madhya Pradesh Indore-Maheshwar-Omkareshwar.
- **The 'Adopt a Heritage' project** aims to develop the heritage sites/monuments, making them tourist friendly and enhancing the tourism potential. This involves active participation of individuals, agencies by becoming **"Monument Mitra"** through the concept of Vision Bidding.
- **PM Vishwakarma Yojana** to create an ecosystem of **support for traditional artisans** and to enable them to flourish in their crafts and contribute to the preservation of India's rich cultural heritage.

Education and Skill Development Initiatives:

- **Protecting natural heritage:** Centre administers **'Scheme of Financial Assistance for the Preservation and Development of Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas'** that provides 10 lakh per year to schools or colleges to study and research on Himalayan cultural heritage.
- **Kashi Tamil Sangamam** was organised by the **Ministry of Education in 2022** to celebrate, reaffirm and rediscover the **age-old links between Tamil Nadu and Varanasi**.
- **Toy Cluster Programme-** To streamline this sector, the government announced the **'Product Specific**

Industrial Cluster Development Programme' in 2020 to build toy clusters in dedicated SEZs and help them become customised, self-sustained ecosystems catering to export markets.

- **Know India Programme**, a three-week orientation programme by the MEA, has created a unique forum for youth diaspora to acquaint themselves with Indian Culture.

Institutional measures to protect heritage

- **The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI):** Founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham. Currently headquartered in New Delhi, Under Ministry of Culture.
 - It is a premier organisation that is responsible for **archaeological research and the conservation and preservation of cultural historical** monuments in the country.
- **Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA):** An autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture focusing on the preservation and promotion of art and culture.
- **Preserving Intangible Heritage:** Institutions like the **Sangeet Natak Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi** actively safeguard and promote these intangible treasures.

International and Technological Initiatives

- India has signed several **bilateral agreements with other countries such as Israel, Japan, and France for Cultural Exchanges** and Promotion.
- **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR):** under Ministry of External Affairs to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people.
- **Culture hubs:** Transportation Hubs including Metro stations and Airports in India have also volunteered in preserving and sensitising the passenger about various Art forms.
- **Netflix and UNESCO** have recently come together to celebrate the rich cultural heritage of India, both tangible and intangible, through a cartooned series titled **Mighty Little Bheem**.

Box 4.1 Constitutional and Legal Provisions for Preserving Heritage:

➤ India's Constitution lays out the framework for heritage preservation. It divides jurisdiction over monuments and archaeological sites as follows:

Union List (Entry 67)	State List (Entry 12)	Concurrent List (Entry 40)
Monuments and sites of historical and archaeological significance designated by Parliament.	Ancient and Historical Monuments controlled or financed by the State other than those declared of national importance.	Both the Union and States share jurisdiction over archaeological sites and remains not declared of national importance by law.

➤ **The Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 49)** obligate the State to **protect every monument or place of artistic or historic interest** declared of national importance by Parliament.

➤ **Article 51A** of the Constitution emphasizes the **duty of every citizen to value and preserve India's rich heritage.**

Legislative Provisions:

➤ **The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR Act) of 1958** empowers the preservation of ancient and historical monuments, archaeological sites, and remains of national importance.

➤ **The Export and Import Control Act 1947** made the export of antiquities subject to a mandatory licence.

▷ **The Customs Act 1962** also prevents the illegal export of antiquities.

➤ **The Antiquities and Art Treasures (AAT) Act 1972:** It regulates the export of antiquities and art treasures, provides for the prevention of smuggling and fraudulent dealings in antiquities, and for the compulsory acquisition of antiquities and art treasures for preservation in public places of India.

5. What are the threats to India's diverse cultural heritage?

India has suffered over the ages, with its heritage not only plundered but also destroyed irrevocably, many a times, by foreign invaders. In the present time there are threats such as

➤ **Issues with the present legal framework**

▷ **Registration of Antiquities:** The AAT Act, 1972, provided that the Central Government may specify those antiquities which should be registered under the Act. As per the extant provisions, **registration of the artefacts was not mandatory.**

» Further, the registration process was not based on scientific testing but relied on discretion. Hence, its accuracy may be ambiguous and subject to disputes.

▷ **Digitisation and documentation of Art objects:** **Documentation of art heritage** is a gaping hole in efforts to preserve and safeguard heritage.

▷ **Repatriation of artifacts:** The ASI stated that the restitution of the objects which were taken out of the country prior to the enforcement of the Act was **not within its control.**

» Hence they **had to depend on the goodwill of other countries** for their restitution.

➤ **Lack of integrated planning:** Many archaeological sites have been destroyed or explored due to developmental

activities, emphasizing the need for cultural resource management.

▷ **For instance,** in 2020, evidence of the Ochre Coloured Pottery (OCP) culture (2100-1900 BCE) emerged in Chandayan, Uttar Pradesh. However, **due to the land still being under cultivation,** the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** has been **unable to commence excavation.**

➤ **Issue with ASI:** According to parliamentary standing committee, ASI working is plagued by lack of centralised monitoring of excavation activities, lack of action plans, and insufficient budget allocation.

➤ **Lack of Coordination:** Inadequate coordination between central and state bodies impairs heritage conservation efforts. **For instance,** the **Elephanta Caves** have faced neglect and deterioration.

➤ **Natural Disasters and changing climate:** India's tropical climate leads to extreme temperatures, humidity, air conditions, and contaminants which is changing due to rise in temperature

- ▶ For e.g. red fort was flooded recently due to flood in Yamuna river, effects of pollution in Taj mahal, etc.
- ▶ **Treats to performing art:** Financial constraints, a lack of institutional support, and waning enthusiasm among the younger generation are hampering performing art such as Tamasha, thali ki Ramayana, etc.
- ▶ **Illicit trafficking of cultural property** driven by greed and lack of heritage appreciation, deprive nations of their heritage and impede archaeological research.
- ▶ For example, **Bronze Nataraja statues smuggled from Tamil Nadu temples** are linked to organized crimes, money laundering, and terrorist financing.

Box 5.1 International Conventions protecting cultural heritage

India is a signatory to several international conventions related to heritage, including

- ▶ **The Hague Convention** for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, **1954**, under the auspices of UNESCO
- ▶ **Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970)**
 - ▶ The sculpture of Parrot Lady dated 10th -11th century C.E. was handed over to India by Canada.
- ▶ **Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2005), and**
- ▶ **Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2006)**
- ▶ Additionally, India holds a seat on the **United Nations World Heritage Committee** for the term 2021-25.

6. What are the measures required to preserve and celebrate India's cultural heritage?

India's cultural heritage is a vast and diverse treasure that requires concerted efforts to preserve and celebrate. A comprehensive approach to safeguarding this heritage involves several key measures:

- ▶ **Revamping ASI:** It can be provided with better funding and ensure that all the conservation processes employed at the Centrally protected monuments are backed by well-documented scientific research.
- ▶ **National Database:** Collaboration between **ISRO** and the **Ministry of Culture** should lead to a comprehensive, GIS-based national database of heritage sites, ensuring efficient preservation.
 - ▶ An overarching management plan is required to revive the heritage structures with creating a **National Archaeological Database** at the outset.
- ▶ **Use of Technology:** Implement advanced technologies like **Photogrammetry, 3D Laser scanning, LiDAR, Block chain technology and Satellite Remote Sensing Surveys** in documentation, surveys, excavation, and conservation efforts.
- ▶ **Excavation and Exploration of Archaeological Sites: Draft of Excavation and Exploration Policy** to be finalized and adopted after public discussion and **Archaeology to be recognised as a separate Cadre as suggested by NITI Aayog.**
- ▶ **Heritage Tourism and Education:** Promote heritage tourism to preserve cultural and historic resources while creating economic opportunities and raising awareness. **The guidelines of the National Conservation policy (given below)** need to be implemented vigorously.
 - ▶ An archaeological site should be subjected to **minimum - whilst only necessary - interventions** so as to maintain its authenticity and integrity.
 - ▶ Conservation should be **treated as a multi-disciplinary enterprise** that focuses on developing holistic solutions
 - ▶ Disaster Management Plan should be made as an important pre-requisite of the Conservation Plan for a monument.
- ▶ **Funding:** From 'crowd funding' to 'community funding', new funding models can be explored. Also, The ASI or State Archaeology Departments need to identify projects that could be carried out in rural areas with **MNERGA funds.**
- ▶ **Dissemination of cultural heritage information to the Citizens:** A national campaign like the **Swachh Bharat Abhiyan** can be started to leverage behavioural economics in changing the perception of citizens and instilling a sense of pride towards our composite heritage.
- ▶ **Involvement of private sector:** National level, State level, District level competitions focusing on culture can be promoted regularly.
 - ▶ Private sector can also be encouraged to promote culture through their CSR programs.
- ▶ **Preserving performing arts:** Developing the idea of a **specific museum (Living Home)** of live performing arts at the regional level is needed.
 - ▶ **Documentation** and the establishment of a **performing arts council** at the regional level to ensure the substantial existence of the art form.

Box 6.1 International best practices in preserving cultural heritage:

- The **'Ruritage' programme of UNESCO** aims to create innovative, rural regeneration based models for cultural and natural heritage. Similar programme may be launched for India, bringing **the role of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development** and to contribute to inclusive economic growth and environmental sustainability in rural areas.
- **Italy's creation of the Carabinieri TPC** marked the **world's inaugural specialized police force for safeguarding cultural property**. However, India currently lacks a dedicated entity for this crucial task and such authority must be established at the earliest.
- **The Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site**, which spans across northern England, has a well-established management plan that involves multiple local authorities and stakeholders.
- **The Angkor Archaeological Park**, a UNESCO World Heritage site, has implemented a comprehensive management plan that involves community engagement, capacity building, and sustainable tourism development.

Conclusion

India's cultural heritage, a vibrant tapestry of diversity and tradition, stands as a beacon of pride and inspiration. Yet, its full potential remains untapped due to a lack of awareness and the challenges of unethical appropriation and trafficking. **Embracing the four Cs - Culture, Creativity, Commerce, and Collaboration** - is key to safeguarding and promoting India's rich heritage, ensuring its preservation for future generations and global appreciation, **positioning India as a cultural superpower.**



TOPIC AT A GLANCE

India's Cultural Heritage

Cultural Heritage is an expression of the ways of living developed by a community and passed on from generation to generation, including customs, practices, objects, artistic expressions and values and broadly divided as **Tangible and Intangible heritage**.



Key elements of India's cultural heritage

- ⊕ **Indian Knowledge Systems:** It comprises of Jnan, Vignan, and Jeevan Darshan that have evolved out of experience, observation, experimentation, and rigorous analysis.
- ⊕ **Indian folk culture:** It is vibrant mixture of traditions, art forms, and customs passed down through generations.
- ⊕ **Religious Diversity:** Birthplace of major religions
- ⊕ **Languages and Scripts:** Over 1,600 languages spoken; Constitution recognizes 22 official languages.
- ⊕ **Art and Architecture:** Rich traditions in painting, sculpture;
- ⊕ **Cuisine and Festivals:** Renowned flavours, regional variations reflecting cultural richness.
- ⊕ **Social and Cultural Practices:** India is as diverse as Europe than a nation state



Roadblocks in Implementing Administrative Reforms in India

- ⊕ **Social Cohesion and Identity:** Heritage binds people.
- ⊕ **Economic Impact:** Heritage economics supports sustainable development along with jobs
- ⊕ **Education and Innovation:** Ancient texts, Yoga, Ayurveda foster creativity, interdisciplinary thinking.
- ⊕ **Environmental Conservation:** Heritage sites promote ecosystem protection, sustainable practices, and social change.
- ⊕ **Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy:** Culture fosters growth in international relations



Government Initiatives for heritage conservation

- ⊕ **Cultural Heritage Conservation and Promotion:** Kashi Culture Pathway, Indian Institute of Heritage, Adopt a Heritage project, and PM Vishwakarma Yojana.
- ⊕ **Education and Skill Development Initiatives:** Kashi Tamil Sangamam, Toy Cluster Programme and Know India Programme.
- ⊕ **Institutional measures:** ASI, IGNC, Sangeet Natak Akademi and Lalit Kala Akademi.
- ⊕ **International Initiatives:** Bilateral agreements with other countries, ICCR, Culture hubs.



Threats to India's diverse cultural heritage

- ⊕ **Lack of integrated planning:** Archaeological sites destroyed due to developmental activities
- ⊕ **Lack of funds:** Limited resources to allocate for heritage conservation.
- ⊕ **Lack of Coordination** between central and state.
- ⊕ **Natural disasters** and Fluctuating environmental conditions.
- ⊕ **Issues in working** of ASI.
- ⊕ **Illicit trafficking of cultural property.**
- ⊕ **Issues with the present legal framework** such as issue in repatriation of artifacts.



Measures to preserve India's cultural heritage

- ⊕ **National Database:** Develop a GIS-based national database in collaboration with ISRO
- ⊕ **Use of Technology:** like Photogrammetry, 3D Laser scanning, LiDAR.
- ⊕ **Revamping ASI:** Strengthen the ASI's Science and R&D wing with enhanced funding
- ⊕ **Funding:** Explore new funding models such as crowd funding and community funding
- ⊕ **Dissemination of cultural heritage information** to the Citizens.
- ⊕ **Preserving Performing Arts:** Regional museums and regional councils for live performing arts

Boxes, Figures and Tables

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