

General Studies – 1; Topic: Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

1) Introduction

- Without architecture, we cannot remember.” — John Ruskin, ‘The Seven Lamps of Architecture’
- India has an extraordinarily rich, vast and diverse cultural heritage in the form of built heritage, archaeological sites and remains since prehistoric times.
- The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), under the Ministry of Culture, is the premier organization for the archaeological researches and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- Maintenance of ancient monuments and archaeological sites and remains of national importance is the prime concern of the ASI.
- It was founded in 1861 by Alexander Cunningham

2) Functions and Powers

- Preservation, conservation and environmental development of centrally protected monuments and sites, including World Heritage Monuments and antiquities
- Maintenance of gardens & development of new gardens surrounding centrally protected monuments and sites
- Exploration and excavation of ancient sites
- Specialized study of inscription and various phases of Indian architecture
- Maintenance of Archaeological site Museums
- Research and Training in different areas of Archaeology
- Some of the conservation works done by ASI are in Junagadh in Gujarat, Taj Mahal, Tomb at Sikandara, Qutb Minar, Sanchi and Mathura.
- Conservation work in other countries includes Bamiyan in Afghanistan, Angkor Vat of Cambodia etc.

3) Importance of Heritage sites

- Built heritage is a significant public good and is recognised as such in the Constitution’s Seventh Schedule.
- It nurtures our collective memories of places and is a significant constituent in the identity of cities.
- It has invaluable potential to contribute to our knowledge of not just history and the arts, but also science and technology.
- Knowledge gained from such resources can provide constructive ways to address development challenges.
- Historic cities are examples of sustainable development. They demonstrate complex connections of man with nature.

4) Concerns / challenges

- A large number of historical sites across the length and breadth of the country lies in worn-down condition.
- Attitude of ordinary people who are destroying historical monuments, who are ignorant of their significance and what they represent in terms of India’s cultural heritage.
- Many of the monuments have either degraded or have been brutally encroached upon by people living in the vicinity.

- Protecting such a vast number of historical monuments and sites would be a challenge given India's human problems.
- Ignorance, government apathy and general neglect are reducing our national treasures to dust.
- The air and water pollution pose a threat to the foundation, stones of such structures as observed in the case of Taj Mahal.
- Another common problem observed in India is spitting and inscribing names/messages on these masterpieces.
- Lack of manpower and resources have also limited ASI's reach and there are instances of ancient buildings and monuments left without any protection.
- Ever-increasing pressure of population and unplanned urbanization has started impacting the monuments.

5) Way Forward

- Best way to preserve historical monuments and artifacts is to turn them into sources of employment and revenue generation.
- Given India's rich past, our monuments and museums can rival the best in the world.
- India should learn from Taiwan and enact a national mission to reclaim, restore and preserve our historical heritage on a war footing.
- The government should hire the best archaeologists, scholars, historians and specialists for this purpose
- The investment made will give back 10 times in revenue if museums and monuments are managed properly.
- The industries should not be set up within the perimeter of these heritage sites.
- More and more companies can take up the restoration and preservation works of these sites as part of their CSR.
- Apart from chemical and structural restoration, thought must be placed to protect them from natural hazards (earthquake, tsunami, floods etc.)
- It is the responsibility of the civil society to transfer the very precious heritage to the next generation.
- Indian Youth comprising of children in schools have a special duty towards raising awareness and protecting the rich cultural heritage
- Let's Keep India Beautiful and preserve the monuments unitedly!