



## City heritage and flawed strategies

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**(Mains GS 1 : Indian Culture - Salient aspects of Art Forms, Literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.)**

### **Context:**

- India's ancient and living civilisation is enormously rich in cultural heritage and its diversity is equally vast, having assimilated thousands of years of diverse cultures.
- This richness is visible in its tangible heritage like archaeological sites, monuments, landscapes, artifacts, and other structures of historical value and its intangible heritage comprising language, music, festivals, dance, social practices, and customs.

### **Indian constitution:**

- The Indian Constitution casts a responsibility on the State to protect and conserve heritage.
- Article 49 of the constitution states that "It shall be the obligation of the State to protect every monument or place or object of artistic or historic interest, (declared by or under law made by Parliament) to be of national importance, from spoliation, disfigurement, destruction, removal, disposal or export, as the case may be."

- Article 51 A (f) widens the responsibility and directs every citizen to contribute to heritage preservation as it states that “It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of our composite culture; and (g) to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life, and to have compassion for living creatures.”

### **National laws :**

- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958 provides for the preservation of ancient and historical monuments, archaeological sites and remains of national importance.
- It stipulates the regulation of archaeological excavations, the protection of sculptures, carvings, and other like objects.
- The National Monument Authority is charged with the grading and classifying of protected monuments and areas.
- A further step that the country took for heritage was when it became a signatory to UNESCO’s World Heritage Convention for the protection of global and national heritage.

### **City Heritage Lists:**

- To expand the effort towards heritage conservation, some major Indian cities have prepared City Heritage Lists that comprise such heritage sites that neither figure as national heritage nor fall in the category of state heritage.
- Cities have also framed their own regulations with state approval for the conservation of local heritage. Mumbai was the first city to come up with such a list in the mid-1990s.
- Heritage included in city lists are generally graded into Grade I, Grade II, and Grade III structures, depending on their significance in terms of heritage.

### **Careful strategy:**

- These city heritage lists contain both public and private properties and many of these are being expanded through the addition of more structures.
- The heritage piece must have an extraordinary significance in some way (beauty, pride, architecture) that would recommend its conservation.
- While it is easy to compile heritage pieces into lists, the burden of preserving such heritage is enormous and raises questions of variety, selection, volume, and finance and reconciling heritage conservation with future development, amongst others.
- Therefore a careful strategy that preserves heritage in the best possible manner without becoming an albatross around the necks of cities needs to be adopted.

### **Emphasis on built heritage:**

- In most city heritage lists, there is an overwhelming emphasis on built heritage and architecture and a broader urban geographical context that integrates the multi-layering of cultural and natural values was overlooked.
- In terms of architecture, there is a propensity to push into city listing a very large number of similar pieces; however, only the best examples need to be preserved since a particular kind of architecture prevailed historically during a period leading to numerous structures of the same architectural type.
- While it is true that in many ways architectural heritage is the most tangible of the lot and has huge tourist attraction, there are other aspects of both tangible and intangible heritage that have high significance.
- Therefore, a proper balance amongst other varieties of heritage ought to be observed.

#### **Encroachment on the rights:**

- Due care needs to be exercised while stepping beyond public heritage sites and getting into the listing of private properties.
- While the Indian courts have approved such listing, one needs to remember that such listing encroaches on the rights of private persons or families and restricts them from the full use of their property.
- Therefore this must be resorted to in exceptional cases where loss of such heritage properties would be a great heritage loss.

#### **Conclusion:**

Listing too many properties without requisite funds and adequate administrative machinery to police them is not wise; therefore, conserving and governing heritage must come out of its own municipal resources.