

1. Discuss critically the role played by Archeological Survey of India (ASI) in preserving India's art and architecture. Examine whether Apni Dharohar scheme should be extended to all World Heritage sites in India? (250 words)

Answer:

Background:-

- Recently Supreme Court (SC) came down heavily on the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for its failure to take appropriate steps to protect and preserve of the iconic Taj Mahal. In this context there is a need to analyse the role of archeological survey of India.

Archeological survey of India:-

- Archaeological Survey of India is an attached office of department of Culture with headquarters in New Delhi. It has 24 regional Circles and 5 Regional Directorates.
- Its main functions are
 - 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
 - Operation of the Antiquities and Art Treasures Act
 - Research and Training in different areas of Archaeology

Role played by archeological survey of India :-

- ASI had made the following contributions:-
 - Discoveries of existence of Harappan culture in places such as Kalibangan in Rajasthan and Dholavira in Gujarat
 - Excavations at Buddhist sites in Kanaganhali in Karnataka and Boxanagar in Tripura
 - Salvage operations at Nagarjunakonda, Andhra Pradesh, and conservation efforts in Hampi, Karnataka, are some of its remarkable projects.
- The ASI protects 3,677 monuments and has copied more than 74,000 inscriptions.
- It has shaped the discipline of archaeology, history and heritage conservation in the country through these significant contributions.

Criticism:-

- Plagued by funds crunch :-
Art and culture received only a meagre 0.16 per cent of the total Central Plan of the government in the Eleventh Five-Year plan allocation. As a result, the Ministry of Culture, which the ASI is a part of, received only a fraction of what it needed.

This would neither help expand the investigation of the unexplored historical landscape nor lead to greater investment in archaeological science.

- The casual approach to publication of reports also reflects the declining importance of excavation.

ASI spends less than one per cent of its total expenditure on excavations. As a result, it has not been able to take up explorations in the manner and scale it has to.

- **Incompetence:-**

Negligence has characterised the conservation efforts of most historical structures in the country, many of which are in advanced stages of decay and a few others lost forever.

- **State apathy:-**

The CAG pointed to connivance by ASI officials as well. As the files of the ASI reveal, there are also numerous instances where politicians have proactively protected those who have illegally occupied the prohibited zone around monuments.

Despite all this, the fact remains that the ASI has not institutionally innovated to meet emerging challenges.

Apni darohar apni pehchan project:-

- Adopt a heritage: Apni Dharohar, Apni Pehchaan is a collaborative effort among the tourism ministry, culture ministry, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), states and union territories.
- It aims to involve companies to take up the responsibility for making our heritage and tourism more sustainable through development, operation, and maintenance of world class tourist infrastructure and amenities at ASI/state heritage sites and other important tourist sites in India.
- Monument mitras are picked through a 'vision bidding' process in which those with the best plan for the heritage sites are chosen.
- It is part of responsible tourism where the 'Monument Mitra' essentially spends his CSR funds for upkeep and maintenance etc., and gets limited visibility.
- The project primarily focusses on providing basic amenities that includes cleanliness, public conveniences, drinking water, ease of access for differently abled and senior citizens, standardized signage.
- 'The Adopt a Heritage' is essentially a non-revenue generating project

The project should be extended to all world heritage sites because:-

- **Tourism:-**

Adopt a Heritage project is meant to address the challenges that the Archaeological Survey of India and other government bodies are facing in operating tourism infrastructure at heritage sites.

By allowing private players to build, operate and maintain "tourist-friendly" and "world class amenities at these sites, the expectation is that the project will boost domestic and international tourism.

- **Preserving monuments:-**

Aga Khan trust success on Humayun's Tomb led to restoration of large number of adjoining monuments

IT giant Infosys Ltd is also involved in restore monuments and organizing cultural shows in south India. In 2016, Infosys Foundation restored Somanatheswara temple complex in Karnataka's Lakshmeshwara and around Rs 5 crore were spent over last four years.

Even in many countries conservation has improved when private entities were involved.

Concerns:-

- Experts believe the government needs to tread with extreme caution as monuments can be exploited in this manner
- Private companies are concerned about their revenues, and they don't know much about conservation work. So the responsibility of the state increases in terms of supervising these companies closely.

Way forward:-

- Every school must have age-group heritage clubs which will look at the built, natural and cultural of heritage of the district it is in through lectures, field trips and exhibitions.
- Humanities must be a compulsory subject in undergraduate education
- Research into and documentation of lost or vanishing heritage (particularly into building materials, techniques etc.) and of the State's historical past must be encouraged in higher educational institutions through liberal funding.
- The government should enhance funding and confer the status of a scientific institution on the ASI to meet its special needs.
- For its part, the ASI should decentralise and make its five regional directorates autonomous. They in turn, with active participation of local governments, should unravel more of the hidden past and protect them better.

Conclusion:-

- Instead of allowing continued defacing and desecration of Indian heritage, one should encourage the Monument Mitra Programme and hope more and more companies come forward to save and salvage our collective national inheritance.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Answer the following Questions

1. Ancient Indian science and philosophies had several real achievements. Discuss and thereafter, critically analyze the recently undertaken NCERT textbook review? (250 words)
2. Gandhi's decision to withdraw from Civil Disobedience Movement and participate in second round table conference was controversial. Examine the controversies that arose as a result of Delhi Pact? (250 words)