

Executive Summary

Constitution of India stipulates that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India to value and preserve the rich heritage of composite culture. We thus, have a special responsibility for preservation of our heritage as one of our fundamental duties.

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the preservation and conservation and promotion of Indian heritage and culture. The Ministry through the Archaeological Survey of India and the Museums is engaged in the protection of all centrally protected monuments of national importance, excavation of historical sites and collection and showcasing the art objects of historical and cultural importance. Through this performance audit, we evaluated the efforts of the Ministry of Culture towards protection, conservation and preservation of country's tangible heritage of monuments and antiquities.

Why did we select this topic?

Heritage structures, sites and antiquities are national assets. The work on heritage identification and preservation started in mid nineteenth century in India much before the independence. However, since independence, the progress made over the years had not been reviewed comprehensively. In the recent times, there has been an increased consciousness in the Indian community towards the heritage and its conservation. In 2012, ASI completed 150 years of existence. Many of its major excavation projects were, however, lying incomplete for years. The preservation projects being undertaken by the ASI too have been marred by several inadequacies and limitations. The organisation has serious funds and manpower shortages for the conservation related activities. There is also a rising trend of incidences of antiquity theft and smuggling of antiquities from the country. Country's premier museums lack resources and planning for proper upkeep, security and display of collected art objects.

Noting the above scenario, we planned this performance audit with the aim to assist the executive in identifying the reasons behind deficient performance of the organisations in the field of heritage preservation and conservation for enabling effective rectificatory steps.

What has been covered in this audit?

The performance audit included a joint physical inspection of 1655 monuments and sites out of the 3678 centrally protected monuments and sites spread nationwide

over 24 ASI Circles. These Monuments and Sites were selected for site inspection on the basis of their historical importance and geographic spread. Seven museums¹ were also included in this physical inspection. Records of the ASI and its offices, the Ministry of Culture, Museums and other associated organisations viz., the National Monument Authority and National Culture Fund for the period 2007-08 to 2011-12 were test checked for this performance audit.

How is the Report organised?

Chapter I of this Report provides background information, audit approach, and details of sample selection. Chapters II to X provide overall audit findings on predefined audit objectives dealing with the themes of preservation and conservation of monuments and antiquities, management of excavation project, funding, functioning of the major museums and monitoring. In Chapter XI we have attempted to examine the governance issues at level of the Ministry and its responsiveness to the recommendations given by various Committees, Court Rulings and earlier CAG Reports. Chapter XII presents the conclusions. The Report contains 61 recommendations.

Highlights of audit findings

- We noted that the Ministry through the ASI had not conducted a comprehensive survey or review to identify monuments which were of national importance for inclusion in the list of centrally protected monuments. Similarly, there were no efforts to identify those monuments which had lost the stature of national importance over a period of time.

(Para 2.1)

- The ASI did not have a reliable database of the exact number of protected monuments under its jurisdiction. In the absence of this primary information, we were unable to conclude if the ASI was able to fulfill its basic mandate effectively.

(Para 2.2)

- During joint physical inspections we found that out of the sample of 1655 centrally protected monuments selected by us, 92 monuments (6 per cent) were not traceable. This was far higher than the number communicated to the Parliament by the ASI.

(Para 2.5)

¹ National Museum, Delhi; Indian Museum, Kolkata; Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata; Asiatic Society, Kolkata; Asiatic Society, Mumbai; Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad and Allahabad Museum, Allahabad.

- The World Heritage Sites did not receive appropriate care and protection. There were numerous cases of encroachment and unauthorised construction in and around these sites. We found that a comprehensive assessment of preservation works that were required had never been carried out.

(Para 3.4)

- The ASI did not have an updated and approved Conservation Policy to address the conservation and preservation requirements. We noted the absence of any prescribed criteria for prioritisation of monuments which required conservation works. As a result, monuments were selected arbitrarily for carrying out conservation works. Further, many monuments were never considered for any kind of structural conservation despite need for the same.

(Para 4.1.1)

- Inspection notes on the condition of monuments were not being prepared by the ASI officials. There was poor documentation of the conservation works. Even basic records such as measurement books, log books and site registers were not being maintained properly. As a result, we could not conclude if the monuments selected for conservation works were need based nor could we ascertain the propriety and genuineness of the expenditure incurred on conservation works.

(Para 4.1.1 & 4.1.2)

- One of the primary activities of the ASI was exploration and excavation of the remains in the country and their study. However, we observed that the ASI was spending less than one *per cent* of its total expenditure on such activities.

(Para 5.3)

- We observed poor documentation of the excavation works carried out by the ASI. The ASI HQ could not provide the status of 458 excavation proposals approved during the last five years. Similarly, complete information was not available on the status of pending excavation reports. We also noted numerous cases of excavation proposals not being undertaken or left incomplete.

(Para 5.4.1 & 5.8)

- The ASI did not have a Comprehensive Policy guideline for the management of Antiquities owned by it. There were no standards for acquisition, preservation, documentation and custody of objects possessed by the ASI. During site inspections we noticed valuable antiquities found during excavations being stored in poor condition.

(Para 6.1.1)

- We observed significant shortcomings in the functioning of Museums in relation to acquisition, documentation and conservation of acquired art objects. Most Museums did not have a system in place for the evaluation of acquired objects to verify their genuineness. We were, therefore, unable to derive any assurance on the authenticity of the artifacts acquired.

(Para 6.2.3)

- Proper maintenance of the accession register was essential to correctly account for the Museum objects and also for their safety. However, systematic maintenance of the accession register was largely absent in the museums. We observed significant discrepancies in the number of antiquities reportedly available in the Indian Museum, Kolkata, National Museum, Delhi and Asiatic Society, Kolkata and those available as per their database.

(Para 6.5.1)

- There was no laid down policy for systematic conservation and restoration of the artifacts which resulted in their deterioration.

(Para 6.8)

- The ASI, as the custodian of antiquities, did not even maintain a database of the total number of antiquities in its possession. In the absence of centralised information, there was a significant risk of theft or loss of these antiquities. During our inspections, we found that 131 antiquities were stolen from various monuments/sites and 37 antiquities from site museums. However, the efforts of the ASI to retrieve these items were completely ineffective.

(Para 6.10.2 & 6.11)

- Museums did not evolve a rotation policy for displaying artifacts in galleries. As a result, more than 95 *per cent* of objects were lying in reserve, in some of the audited museums without ever having been put on display.

(Para 6.14.1)

- There were acute shortages of staff in all key positions in the ASI. This adversely affected the security and maintenance of monuments. Shortage of staff was also noticed in some of the museums and other organisations like NMA.

(Para 8.1.1 & 8.6)

- Governance from the Ministry of Culture was lax and was found deficient on aspects of adequacy of policy and legislation, financial management, monitoring of conservation projects and provision of human resources to these organisations.

(Para 11.1)

- Over the years, shortcomings related to the functioning of the ASI and museums had been highlighted by various expert/Parliamentary Committees. However, Ministry failed to take note of these red signals for initiating corrective measures.

(Para 11.1.4)

Summary of Recommendations:

- The lists of protected monuments should be updated and reconciled periodically so that there was no ambiguity with regard to the number of protected monuments under each Sub Circle, Circle and the ASI as a whole.
- The ASI should make a provision for inspection of each protected monument by an officer of suitable level periodically. The ASI should publish the state of each monument being protected by it on the basis of detailed inspection note and photographic evidence collected during such inspection on a regular basis.
- The ASI should have a laid down policy for notification of sites with contested ownership or occupants. These sites can be placed in the tentative list for nomination till all disputes are resolved.
- There is an urgent need to come up with a written agreement with the management of the sites with restrictive entry, to enable access to these sites by common visitors. The ASI also needs to develop policy for maintaining such sites.
- It is inevitable that changes would be carried out in the protected monuments if they are to be also used as offices and residences. For these exceptions, the ASI should prepare detailed guidelines and get the Act revised appropriately.
- The notification is an important document which not only provides a legal status for centrally protected monument but also defines the area of the site. This document is crucial for establishing encroachment or unauthorised construction at the site. The ASI should maintain a centralised database of all notifications and records related to the sites which should be readily available with the ASI HQ.
- There should be no room for ambiguity and difference in factual information related to the monuments. The ASI should collect the MIS data from its Circles on each of the protected monument and place it in public domain after reconciling the discrepancies.
- The Ministry should come up with a strategy to ensure time bound completion of heritage by-laws for all protected monuments and their speedy approval.
- The ASI should define objective criteria and requirements for selection of sites for the tentative list and from the tentative list for final inscription of World Heritage Site, as this will help in prioritising, planning and preparing the sites before nomination.

- The ASI should adopt a systematic approach for the development of tentative world heritage sites through conservation and site management. This alone can ensure final inscription of the site.
- The Ministry should develop a separate project for maintenance and security of World Heritage Sites. There should be proper assessment of funds, security and conservation requirements.
- The Ministry should develop a Comprehensive Conservation Policy and update its manuals and works code. The ASI should make it mandatory to maintain log books for each protected monument with detailed documentation of all conservation efforts.
- To be effective, the ASI needs to prioritise its projects requiring funding through NCF. For this, a comprehensive assessment of funds needs to be carried out in advance.
- There should be detailed guidelines on management of 'living' monuments.
- Documentation on 'non-living' monuments should be properly maintained to curb instances of unauthorised possession and use.
- The Ministry should ensure finalisation of the National Policy on Archaeological Excavation and Exploration expeditiously.
- The ASI may consider devising mechanisms for preparing a priority list for excavation projects based on importance of the site. The list may be updated annually.
- A protocol is required for handing over and maintenance of antiquities with laid down responsibilities and accountability for loss. Proper arrangement needs to be made for storing these antiquities.
- The ASI may prepare an inventory of the excavated antiquities and their locations and put it in public domain so as to facilitate its use for reference/research by scholars.
- The ASI needs to enhance the use of modern scientific technology, build capacity of its officials and establish an upgraded dating laboratory of its own.
- The provisions of AAT Act and the International Conventions should be reviewed in order to make the legislation more contemporary and effective and to facilitate restoration of stolen art objects from other countries.
- The Ministry should expedite the work of registering antiquities and devise procedures for ensuring the genuineness of the registered antiquities in a time bound manner. Electronic format may be considered for the purpose.
- The ASI should develop a centralised and digitised data base of antiquities to document all details of antiquities stored at different locations.

- There is a need for a more concerted approach for retrieval of Indian art objects stolen or illegally exported to other countries. The ASI, as the nodal agency for this purpose needs to be more proactive and vigilant in its efforts and the Ministry needs to develop an aggressive strategy for the same.
- The Ministry should frame a comprehensive policy for Management of Antiquities owned by different central museums.
- The ASI needs to develop detailed guidelines for the functioning and establishment of site museums.
- The Museums should adopt a rotation policy for the display of artifacts. It should device mechanism for proper and attractive display methods to attract visitors.
- The reserve collection should also be properly maintained and preserved in suitable storing conditions.
- The ASI should frame clear norms and guidelines for designating a particular monument as ticketed, with a view to enhance the revenue realisation from sale of entry tickets.
- The ASI needs to revise the rates for film shooting and ticketing to make it a substantial source of revenue.
- The Ministry needs to diversify and explore on the new modes of revenue generation from the Heritage Sites and Museums. Options should be explored in view of best practices adopted globally.
- The Ministry should take immediate steps to resolve manpower shortages especially in the crucial cadres engaged in Conservation related works.
- The ASI should constitute a coordination body with representatives of respective State Governments at each Circle to check the incidents of encroachments with the cooperation of District and Police authorities.
- There should be regular monitoring of existing encroachment cases by the Ministry at the highest level. Encroachment by State Government agencies or other Government of India agencies should be sorted out in a time bound manner by raising the matter at higher levels.
- There should be a security plan for each monument, taking into account its location, area, structure, footfall and other vulnerabilities. This exercise should be performed in house by the ASI to ensure coverage of ground level realities.
- The Museums should adopt appropriate security measures to provide protection against theft, damage and losses. The Ministry should take initiative in development of a comprehensive security policy for museums with uniform standards for all museums under its control.
- The ASI should have funds earmarked specifically for awareness, interpretation and related activities.

