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A Conservation Manual, Drafted by the Ordinary Citizen

Context

- In his Independence Day addresses, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has frequently **called on citizens to honour the legacy of those who fought against colonial rule.**
- His reminders, **though timely, often remain symbolic, naming a handful of freedom fighters or quoting their words,** rather than offering substantive ways of engaging with India's past.
- This **superficiality mirrors the Archaeological Survey of India's (ASI) own approach to heritage:** conserving monuments by isolating, repairing, and occasionally beautifying them.
- While **these efforts are not without value, they fall short of addressing the enormity and complexity of India's historical landscape.**

Colonial Legacies and Present Shortcomings

- The roots of India's **conservation practices lie in colonial ambitions.**
- **British officers catalogued monuments** and codified preservation laws, motivated less by cultural reverence and **more by administrative control.**
- **John Marshall's Conservation Manual (1923),** with its emphasis on structural repair and landscaped surroundings, **continues to shape ASI practices nearly a century later.**
- **Yet, surveys, audits, and court rulings reveal** that many **protected monuments are crumbling,** with conservation policies inconsistently followed.
- The **government's invitation for corporations to adopt monuments illustrates a shift toward privatisation but risks reducing heritage into commodified symbols** rather than shared cultural legacies.

Learning from Gandhi and the Arts of Translation

- A more **meaningful roadmap begins with revisiting alternative visions,** such as Gandhi's Sarvodaya, his **rendering of John Ruskin's essays.**
- Gandhi **emphasised dignity in all forms of labour, collective welfare,** and admiration for craft.
- If **applied to conservation, these values would expand preservation** beyond mere structural integrity to improving the lives of surrounding communities and enriching visitor engagement.

- **Monuments would no longer be cordoned relics** but spaces where resilience, ingenuity, and human interconnectedness are celebrated.
- The **practice of translation further offers powerful metaphors**. Modern translators recognise that meanings shift across time and language, and that fidelity to the past requires acknowledging distance rather than erasing it.
- **Conservation too must embrace transparency**: interventions should be visible, ensuring visitors distinguish between the ancient and the restored.
- Just as **translators periodically revisit texts for relevance, conservationists should review preservation materials** for appropriateness, preventing harm to historical fabrics.

Lessons from Science and Ecology and the Role of Citizens

• Lessons from Science and Ecology

- Conservation, the text argues, can draw **insights from diverse fields**.
- **Wildlife biologists highlight the importance of ecosystems** rather than isolated species, a perspective that encourages viewing monuments within broader landscapes of water bodies, forests, and settlements.
- This **could even mean dismantling boundary walls** that cut monuments off from their environments.
- Similarly, **mycologists demonstrate how fungi, agents of decay and renewal, sustain life cycles**.
- By analogy, **neglected monuments such as old wells, cisterns, and city walls can be reimagined as resources that secure water**, provide habitats, and foster community spaces.
- Economics too reframes conservation. Economists show that value lies in function, not appearance.
- **A haveli's natural ventilation may be more significant** than a newly painted façade.
- Concepts such as **scarcity and creative destruction can guide conservation strategies, from justifying larger budgets** to transforming submerged temples into laboratories for underwater archaeology.
- In each case, the point is clear: heritage should be dynamic, adaptive, and generative.

• The Role of Citizens

- Ultimately, heritage is not the ASI's responsibility alone. **In a country as diverse as India, the meaning of conservation is contested and contextual**.
- **Citizens must cultivate literacy in the language of stones**, reading biases of builders, listening to silenced voices, and confronting prejudices.
- Monuments are not just relics but mirrors of society.
- **By engaging critically and empathetically, citizens can help transform India into a monument without walls**, where the preservation of culture is inseparable from the shaping of a shared future.

Conclusion

- The **challenges before India is to move beyond colonial-era conservation practices** toward a richer, more inclusive vision.
- **Monuments should not be polished remnants of the past but living sites** that connect communities, ecosystems, and histories.
- **Drawing on Gandhi's philosophy, translators' sensitivities**, ecological thinking, and economic insights, **the ASI and citizens alike can co-author a new conservation manual**, one that values memory, dialogue, and the multiplicity of perspectives.
- In doing so, **India can conserve not just its stones, but the diverse voices** and lives they embody.

A Conservation Manual, Drafted by the Ordinary Citizen FAQs

Q1. What are the shortcomings of the ASI's current approach to conservation?

Ans. The primary focus of ASI is on repairing and isolating monuments, which treats heritage as static relics rather than living cultural spaces.

Q2. How does Gandhi's Sarvodaya inspire a new vision for monument conservation?

Ans. Gandhi's Sarvodaya suggests that conservation should not only preserve structures but also improve the lives of surrounding communities and honour the dignity of labour.

Q3. Why are translators' practices used as a metaphor for conservation?

Ans. Translators show that meanings change over time and that acknowledging distance from the past is essential; similarly, conservation should make restoration work visible and regularly reassess preservation methods.

Q4. What lessons can science and ecology offer to heritage conservation?

Science and ecology teach that monuments should be understood within broader systems, such as landscapes, water bodies, and communities, rather than as isolated structures.

Q5. What role do citizens have in shaping conservation?

Ans. Citizens must learn to read monuments critically, engage with their histories, and use them as mirrors to confront social biases, thereby helping to preserve heritage as a shared living legacy.

Source: [The Hindu](#)

India at 79th Independence Day - Journey, Achievements, and the Road Ahead

Context:

- India celebrated its 79th Independence Day with pride as a **resilient, confident, and rising nation**.
- Despite historical challenges such as US sanctions post-Pokhran (1998) and the Seventh Fleet episode (1971 war with Pakistan), India has emerged stronger.

- Today, it is recognized as **one of the fastest-growing economies** and a major global player.

India's Economic Growth:

- **GDP growth:** From \$30 billion (1947) to a projected \$4.19 trillion (2025) (IMF estimates).
- **Global standing:**
 - **In nominal GDP** – 4th largest by 2025.
 - **In PPP terms** – Already 3rd largest (\$17.65 trillion).
- **Growth under the present government (FY15-FY25):**
 - Real GDP growth average – 6.5% annually.
 - Agriculture GDP growth average – 4% annually.

Socio-Economic Transformation:

- **Poverty:** Measured at the \$3/day (2021 PPP) threshold, it has reduced from 80% (1947) to 5.3% in 2025 (World Bank estimates).
- **Literacy:** Increased from 18.3% (1951) to 77% (2023).
- **Life expectancy:** From 32 years (1947) to 72 years (2023).
- **Women's empowerment:** Significant strides in education, socio-economic-political participation, and leadership.

Agriculture and Food Security:

- **Foodgrain production:** Foodgrain production has multiplied sevenfold, from 50 MMT (1947) to 353.9 MMT (2024-25).
- **Exports:** World's largest rice exporter (20.2 MMT in FY25). Horticulture, milk, egg production have multiplied many times.
- **Self-sufficiency:** India is a net exporter of agriculture, unlike the US and China.
- **Challenges:** Though India has achieved food security, there are still many challenges, for example, nutritional security, especially of children under the age of five, remains pressing.

Technology, Science and Space Achievements:

- **Space exploration:** From **Chandrayaan's** historic landing near the Moon's South Pole to the trailblazing Mars mission (**Mangalyaan**), India has staked its place at the frontiers of space exploration.
- **Digital revolution:** The meteoric rise of the **Unified Payments Interface (UPI)**, processing over 10 billion transactions each month and inspiring fintech innovations worldwide, reflects a digital revolution.
- **Global leadership:** Indian-origin CEOs (such as Sundar Pichai, Satya Nadella, Indra Nooyi) lead global corporations (Google, Microsoft, PepsiCo).
- **Slogans of progress:**
 - "Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan" (Shastri).
 - "Jai Vigyan" (Vajpayee).
 - "Jai Anusandhan" (Modi).

Challenges Ahead:

- **Subsidies:**
 - **Shield vulnerable populations, but plagued by large inefficiencies:**
 - Together, these account for **nearly Rs 3.71 lakh crore** in the 2025–26 Union Budget — Rs 2.03 lakh crore for food and Rs 1.67 lakh crore for fertilisers.
 - Studies suggest that at least **20 to 25% of these subsidies fail to reach** intended beneficiaries.
 - **Need for reforms:** Rationalise subsidies, focus on agri-R&D, innovation, and value chains.
- **Environmental concerns:** Protect soil, water, and air quality to sustain growth.
- **Nutritional security:** Address child malnutrition through women's education, maternal health, sanitation.

India in the Global Context:

- **Comparisons:**
 - China's **per capita income** in 2025 is \$13,690 (PPP \$28,980), while India is at \$2,880 (PPP \$12,130).
 - However, for India, **democracy remains its compass/ strength**, setting it apart from its neighbours.
- **Global relevance:** India has lessons for many countries in Asia and Africa, and in many high-tech sectors, it competes with the best.

Vision for Viksit Bharat @ 2047:

- **Core pillars:**
 - Accelerating inclusive growth.
 - Cutting bureaucratic hurdles.
 - Strengthening scientific culture.
 - Sustainable development with environmental safeguards.
- **Aim:** To establish India as a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by its centenary of independence (2047).

Conclusion:

- **By 2047**, India's centenary of independence will mark not only the achievement of Viksit Bharat, but also its emergence as a global leader in technology, agriculture, and inclusive governance.
- With **democracy as its guiding compass and sustainability at its core**, India is poised to script a model of development that inspires the world.

India at 79th Independence Day FAQs

Q1. What factors have contributed to India's economic transformation since independence?

Ans. Economic reforms, demographic dividend, digital revolution, agricultural self-sufficiency, and global integration have collectively driven India's transformation to a projected \$4.19 trillion by 2025.

Q2. What are India's achievements in agriculture since 1947?

Ans. India has become a net agricultural exporter with foodgrain production rising sevenfold and record rice exports.

Q3. How have science, technology, and space exploration shaped India's global image in the 21st century?

Ans. Missions like Chandrayaan and Mangalyaan, UPI-led digital transformation, and leadership of Indian-origin CEOs in global corporations have positioned India as a global innovator.

Q4. What is the role of subsidies in India's agri-food sector?

Ans. While food and fertiliser subsidies protect vulnerable populations, inefficiencies and leakages (20–25%) demand rationalisation and a shift toward agri-R&D for long-term sustainability.

Q5. What is India's progress in social indicators since 1947?

Ans. Poverty has reduced from 80% to 5.3%, literacy has risen from 18.3% to 77%, and life expectancy has more than doubled.

Source: IE

India Redefines Engagement with Africa in Namibia

Context:

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to Namibia's National Assembly in July showcased a culturally rooted approach to diplomacy.
- By quoting a Namibian poet, invoking the symbolism of the Welwitschia mirabilis plant and the Springbok, and speaking in Oshiwambo, he struck a chord with the audience, earning laughter and applause.
- This grounded, culturally sensitive engagement reflects a sharp departure from Western approaches, which remain tied to conditional aid, migration control, and episodic withdrawals, such as recent USAID cutbacks.
- India's style emphasizes partnership, respect, and shared symbolism over transactional assistance, presenting a new model of international cooperation.
- This article highlights India's evolving engagement with Africa through the lens of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Namibia visit.

India's Three-Step Engagement with Namibia

- India is pursuing a measured, adaptive approach in its engagement with Namibia, based on a deliberate three-step logic: **shared history**, **present cooperation**, and **future-oriented collaboration**.
- **Anchoring in Shared History**
 - India emphasizes anti-colonial solidarity and long-standing ties, recalling its support for Namibia's liberation struggle and UN peacekeeping contributions.
 - These historical references reinforce India's image as a consistent, long-term partner, unlike the episodic involvement of many other powers.

- **Strengthening Present Cooperation**

- India highlights ongoing trade, modest at \$800 million, but backed by a much larger \$12 billion Africa-wide development partnership.
- More importantly, India invests in capacity-building initiatives such as the India-Namibia Centre of Excellence in IT and the 'India Wing' at the University of Namibia, reflecting a focus on education, technology, and youth-oriented development.

- **Building a Future Road Map**

- Looking ahead, India is pivoting towards knowledge-based cooperation.
- Namibia's adoption of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) marks a breakthrough in digital diplomacy.
- This serves as a model for exporting not just digital tools, but also governance frameworks and institutional know-how tested in India.
- In essence, India's approach to Namibia reflects a **thoughtful, durable model of partnership**, rooted in historical solidarity, strengthened by pragmatic cooperation, and projected toward a shared digital and developmental future.

Advantage Namibia: India's Strategic Engagement

- Namibia offers India a reliable partner due to its **political stability, rich mineral wealth, and growing technological base**.
- Shared histories and a vision for equitable governance provide a strong foundation.
- President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah's call for fairer global financial systems aligns closely with India's push for inclusive, just global governance.

Outcomes of PM Modi's Visit

- Prime Minister Modi's visit to Namibia, the first in nearly three decades, was symbolically important but produced **modest outcomes**.
- Agreements included two **MoUs on entrepreneurship and health**, and Namibia's accession to the **Global Biofuels Alliance** and the **Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure**.
- These steps are valuable, but fall short of the full potential of the partnership.

Missed Opportunity on Critical Minerals

- Namibia, a **leading uranium producer**, is crucial for India's goal of resilient low-carbon supply chains.
- However, the visit did not yield a strategic framework for cooperation in **resource access, workforce development, or investment in value addition**.
- While acknowledged, discussions failed to deliver concrete agreements in this high-value area.

India's Distinctive Approach

- Despite gaps, India's engagement stands out for **how it builds trust**—through inclusive dialogue, recognition of historical solidarity, and respect for African priorities.
- Unlike transactional Western approaches, India positions itself as a long-term partner in shaping the **Global South's collective agency** and aspirations.

Moving Beyond Symbolism: India's Next Steps in Africa

- The upcoming **India-Africa Forum Summit** offers a timely platform to institutionalise recent diplomatic gestures into **formal cooperation frameworks**.
- It is an opportunity for India to demonstrate that its engagement with Africa is not episodic but built on **enduring political resolve**.
- For India to build credibility, **symbolism alone will not suffice**.
- It must address **structural and operational shortcomings at home**, ensuring that its strategic ambitions in Africa are backed by sustained **financial investment, coherent policies, and robust institutional support**.
- India's credibility as a trusted **Global South partner** will ultimately depend not only on the promises it makes but also on **consistent, collaborative follow-through**.
- Long-term partnerships require more than goodwill; they demand reliable execution and mutual trust.

Conclusion

- India's partnership with Namibia reflects a promising model of trust-based diplomacy, but its true credibility will depend on consistent follow-through, strategic investment, and sustained institutional commitment.

India Redefines Engagement with Africa in Namibia FAQs

Q1. How did Prime Minister Modi's Namibia address differ from Western diplomatic approaches?

Ans. PM Modi used cultural references, Oshiwambo phrases, and Namibian symbols, reflecting respect and partnership, unlike the West's conditional, transactional, and episodic engagement.

Q2. What three-step logic underpins India's engagement with Namibia?

Ans. India's approach rests on shared anti-colonial history, pragmatic present-day cooperation in trade and education, and a forward-looking focus on digital and knowledge-based collaboration.

Q3. Why is Namibia strategically significant for India?

Ans. Namibia offers political stability, mineral wealth, technological potential, and a shared vision for fair global governance, aligning with India's inclusive Global South agenda.

Q4. What were the key outcomes of Modi's Namibia visit?

Ans. The visit produced two MoUs on entrepreneurship and health, and Namibia's entry into the Global Biofuels Alliance and Disaster Resilient Infrastructure Coalition.

Q5. Why must India move beyond symbolic diplomacy in Africa?

Ans. India's credibility depends on addressing domestic shortcomings, ensuring sustained investment, and demonstrating consistent follow-through in institutionalising long-term African partnerships.

Source: TH

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