

Opening Monument Conservation to the Private Sector - India's Shift towards a PPP Model

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Monument Conservation Latest News

- In a significant policy shift, the Government of India is set to allow private sector participation in the core conservation of protected monuments, a domain hitherto monopolised by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).
- This move aims to **address capacity constraints**, improve efficiency, and mobilise CSR funding for heritage conservation, while retaining regulatory oversight with the ASI.

Key Developments

- The Ministry of Culture is empanelling private conservation architects and agencies through a Request for Proposal (RFP) process, closing on January 12.
- Over 20 private heritage conservation agencies from across the country have applied.

- After empanelment, corporate donors contributing via the **National Culture Fund (NCF)** will be allowed to directly engage conservation agencies of their choice.
- The conservation work will be undertaken within ASI-prescribed frameworks and under its overall supervision.

How the New Model Will Work

- **Eligibility criteria for conservation architects:**
 - **Experience** in conservation or restoration of centrally protected monuments under ASI, State Archaeology Departments, CPWD or State PWD.
 - Experience in heritage projects of PSUs, municipal corporations, and private palaces or buildings (minimum 100 years old).
- **Role of donors and agencies:**
 - Donors provide funds to the NCF under CSR provisions.
 - Donors have independence to select empanelled conservation architects.
 - Projects must adhere to approved Detailed Project Reports (DPRs), timeframes fixed by donors, and established conservation norms.
 - Execution will be carried out by private agencies, under guidance of conservation architects, supervision of ASI or concerned government agencies.

Reasons for the Shift - Limitations of the Existing ASI Model

- **Monopoly and capacity constraints:**
 - ASI is responsible for conserving around 3,700 protected monuments.
 - It has been the sole agency for preparing DPRs, executing conservation works.
 - This led to **slow project implementation**, delays in utilisation of CSR funds.
- **Performance of the NCF:**
 - Established in **1996** with an initial corpus of ₹20 crore, the fund has received ₹140 crore in donations so far.
 - It has funded about 100 conservation projects – 70 completed, almost 20 ongoing.
 - The corporate donors faced difficulties due to weak compliance timelines.

What is News Compared to Earlier Initiatives

- The earlier '**Adopt a Heritage**' scheme allowed corporates to become **Monument Mitras** but was limited to tourist amenities (toilets, ticketing, cafes, signage).
- For the first time, private donors are being allowed into **core** conservation work of monuments.
- The Ministry has identified 250 monuments requiring conservation. Donors may choose from the list, or propose monuments based on regional or thematic preference (subject to approval).

Global Parallels (Best Practices)

- **United Kingdom:** Churches Conservation Trust with strong private participation.
- **United States:** Active involvement of private organisations and funding in heritage protection.

- **Germany and Netherlands:** Heritage foundations supported by private funding.
- These models reflect Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) under strong state regulation.

Challenges and Way Ahead

- **Risk of commercialisation of heritage:** Transparent audits and periodic reviews of projects. Promote community and academic involvement alongside corporates.
- **Ensuring uniform conservation:** Develop clear conservation guidelines and SOPs.
- **Potential conflicts:** Between donor preferences and archaeological integrity.
- **Need for robust monitoring mechanisms:** To prevent dilution of ASI's authority. Strengthen ASI's role as a regulator and knowledge authority.
- **Capacity constraints:** Capacity-building and certification of conservation professionals.

Conclusion

- Opening monument conservation to the private sector marks a paradigm shift in India's heritage governance, moving towards a PPP-based, capacity-enhancing model.
- While the ASI retains supervisory control, private participation is expected to accelerate conservation, improve fund utilisation, and create a national talent pool in heritage management.
- Success, however, will depend on strong **regulation, accountability, and adherence** to conservation ethics.

Source: IE

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