

Executive Summary

Introduction: Our archaeological heritage include over 4 lakh plus structures and 58 lakh plus antiquities, mostly under the control of Central and State level authorities, museums, religious bodies, etc. In view of our unique and priceless cultural and archaeological heritage, traditional knowledge, customs, and also due to rapid urbanisation a dedicated infrastructure and legislative framework to protect our archaeological heritage is important.

The Ministry of Culture is responsible for the preservation, conservation and promotion of Indian heritage and culture. The Ministry, through the Archaeological Survey of India (established in 1861), Museums, National Monument Authority and other agencies is engaged in the protection of all centrally protected monuments of national importance, excavation of historical sites, collection and showcasing of artefacts, their documentation and digitisation, etc.

The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) had undertaken (2012-13) a Performance Audit on Preservation and Conservation of Monuments and Antiquities and the Report (No. 18 of 2013) was tabled in the Parliament in August 2013. The Audit Report was discussed by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) in its Reports No. 39 (April 2016) and 118 (December 2018). The PAC had made 25 specific recommendations after reorganising the observations in four groups viz. Policy, Human Resources, Financial Management and Functional Issues.

The present Report is a follow-up of previous Performance Audit. The audit was undertaken to verify the actions taken on the areas of concern reported earlier and to examine the extent of action taken on the recommendations made by the PAC. The follow-up audit was undertaken during 2020-21. Stakeholders covered during the previous audit viz. Ministry of Culture, ASI, National Culture Fund, National Monument Authority, National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities and various national level museums were included in the scope of follow-up audit. Seven States viz. Delhi, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal were also selected for examining the monuments and ASI offices at lower level viz. circles and branch offices, site-museums, monuments and excavation sites.

In the present audit report, chapters containing issues reported previously and relevant contemporary findings have been arranged in four groups as discussed by the PAC. Despite it being a follow-up audit report, efforts have been made to present the findings as an independent audit report.



Key findings: Important audit observations relating to compliance of the recommendations of the PAC and other concern areas are as below:

- Against the recommendation of the PAC, notification of rules and conservation activities under National Conservation Policy, notification of Archaeological Excavation Policy, updation of Antiquities and Art Treasure Act, modification in Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act regarding system for recording footfall was not done. Despite PAC's recommendation, there was no uniform procedure for museums under the control of the Ministry/ASI. Ministry/ASI reported that most of these exercise were under process and will be finalized during the year.

(Para 3.1)

- National Monument Authority was constituted as a statutory body (in 2011) for providing no-objection certificates for undertaking construction activities in the prohibited/regulated area of the monuments. The basic objective was implementation of the statutory provisions through preparation of Heritage Bye-Laws (HBL) and Site-Plans for each monument. However, out of 3693 Centrally Protected Monuments, HBL for only 31 monuments have been notified while finalisation of HBL for 210 monuments were at different stages viz. notification, consultation, etc. As such there have been considerable delay in the process.

(Para 3.2)

- ASI had no strategy or road-map (long term/medium term) to fulfill its mandate. The conservation activities were being undertaken on ad-hoc/annual basis. Central Advisory Board on Archaeology conceptualised as apex body to advise ASI on matters relating to archaeology was inactive after March 2018 and had only one meeting during 2014-18 (in October 2014). Despite recommendation of the PAC no coordination and monitoring mechanism was established at Central or Circle levels to check the incidents of encroachment.

(Para 4.1)

- With regard to human resource constraints, PAC had asked the Ministry/ASI to expedite the restructuring process of ASI and make effort in filling the current vacancies. However, overall vacancy position of ASI had remained static at 29 *per cent* since earlier audit. At management levels and in important conservation branches of ASI the position had further deteriorated.

(Para 4.2)

- After 2017-18, increase in ASI's overall expenditure and its expenditure on heritage protection activities (40 *per cent* of total expenditure) was moderate. Ministry had intimated the PAC regarding its decision to increase the budget on exploration/excavation activities to five *per cent* of the total budget. Despite



the assurance given by the Ministry, ASI's expenditure on excavation and exploration activities was still less than one *per cent*.

(Para 5.1)

- To provide external budgetary funding for heritage conservation National Culture Fund was established in November 1996. The PAC had recommended that coordination between ASI and NCF should be strengthened to rope in more corporate groups and individuals into funding conservation and visitors' amenities at monuments. In this regard, against the primary corpus of ₹ 19.50 crore, endowment available with NCF rose to ₹ 76 crore by March 2021. Less than 14 *per cent* utilisation towards the objectives of NCF indicate absence of its coordination with ASI. In this regard, ASI intimated that it had prepared a shelf of around 50 works for sharing with prospective sponsors.

(Para 5.1.2)

- In view of recommendation of the PAC, ASI had revised its ticket and other charges for monuments and had included more monuments under the ticketed category. However, there was weak reconciliation and financial control mechanism.

(Paras 5.2 and 5.3)

- National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA) was launched by the Government (in 2007) to prepare a national database of all monuments and antiquities in the country in five years. NMMA was extended for another five year period (2012-17) and later merged with ASI. Out of 4 lakh plus heritage structures and 58 lakh plus antiquities, only 1.84 lakh monuments and 16.83 lakh antiquities have been documented so far. NMMA attributed logistical insufficiency, ineffective monitoring and budgetary constraints as the reasons for defaults in achieving the target. Audit identified absence of strategy/road-map, technical capability, mechanism to control and carry out the work as other reasons for this delay.

(Para 6.1)

- Ministry had informed the PAC that categorisation of monuments in eight classified categories was completed and handed over to NMA for consideration and notification. It was noted that the process was incomplete. A list of only 915 monuments was prepared by ASI which was still under consideration.

(Para 6.2.1)

- PAC had recommended that guidelines for determination of national importance of monuments to be finalised at the earliest and after this a comprehensive survey should be conducted to identify the exact number of monuments that can be protected. It was noted that guidelines was not prepared, no survey/review of monuments was undertaken by ASI. Instances defining absence of criteria for centrally protected monuments as reported



earlier were still existing. In this regard, Ministry/ASI informed that taking of survey is an ongoing phenomenon and the view of PAC was not relevant/possible to be implemented.

(Para 6.3)

- Discrepancies in the list of Centrally Protected Monuments and issues related with de-notification of missing monuments (as reported earlier) were still existing despite assurance that efforts would be made for their rectification. Ministry/ASI stated that the observation have been noted and corrective measures will be taken.

(Paras 6.3.3 and 6.3.4)

- Joint physical inspection of selected monuments *viz.* World Heritage Sites, Adarsh and Ticketed Monuments, Living Monuments, *Baolis, Kos-Minar, etc.* revealed cases of (i) absence of public amenities *viz.* public toilet, drinking water, parking, ramp, guide, security, etc. (ii) issues related with conservation works at monuments, and (iii) management of heritage gardens. In this respect Ministry/ASI stated that providing/upgrading visitors facilities is a regular phenomenon. It also intimated initiatives *viz. Adarsh Smarak, Adopt-a-Heritage* scheme for improving the facilities at the monuments.

(Para 7.1)

- At selected national level museums and site museums under ASI, concerns related with antiquity management *viz.* non-formation of Art Purchase Committees, acquisition, accession, verification, display and rotation of artefacts, their storage, preservation and security have been included and also depicted through photographs.

(Paras 8.1 and 8.2)

- PAC had asked the Ministry/ASI to draw action plan under the excavation policy and ensure adequate allocation and effective utilisation of funds for these activities. It was noted that ASI had no action plan based on its exploration and excavation policy. ASI had not centralised information/monitoring system displaying excavation proposals, their status. Writing of excavation reports was pending for more than 60 years and its expenditure on the activity was less than one *per cent.*

(Para 9.2)

Ministry/ASI was expected to take stock of its performance in view of all the previous recommendations made by Audit/PAC and also in the light of issues discussed during the present audit to bring about a holistic change in its working and performance. Ministry/ASI had also assured timely action on most of the issues included in the Report.

