

A THUMBS DOWN FOR THE 'ADOPT A HERITAGE' SCHEME

Relevant for: null | Topic: Indian Architecture incl. Art & Craft & Paintings

To enjoy additional benefits

CONNECT WITH US

March 01, 2023 12:16 am | Updated 02:45 am IST

COMMENTS

SHARE

READ LATER

'Businesses can help citizens understand why monuments matter by earmarking CSR funds for grants for researching, writing, and publishing quality textbooks, and developing effective ways of teaching history' | Photo Credit: M. Moorthy

Private firms, companies, and public sector units can enter into agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to [adopt and maintain State-owned archaeological sites or monuments](#). Businesses that enter such agreements are going to be known as Monument Mitras. The central government is eager that this scheme, which began in February, leads to the adoption of 500 protected sites by August 15, and the adoption of another 500 sites shortly thereafter. This number represents a tenfold increase in the number of sites being brought under the ambit of the controversial 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme of 2017. Unless the 'revamped' scheme is suspended, the nation's precious pluralistic heritage stands at the threshold of obliteration.

Under the purportedly overhauled 'Adopt a Heritage' scheme, businesses may use their Corporate Social Responsibility funds at select sites to construct and maintain ticket offices, restaurants, museums, interpretation centres, toilets, and walkways. They may dramatically illuminate monuments, set up guided tours, hold cultural programmes, and fix equipment for light and sound shows. Some of these activities appear to be progressive measures aimed at improving visitor services and amenities. However, scrutiny establishes perils.

To begin, just as permitting a watch company without expertise in bridge engineering to maintain a colonial-era bridge in Morbi, Gujarat, possibly contributed to heart-wrenching tragedy, so too giving businesses, rather than trained professionals, a chance to build museums and interpretation centres and develop their content threatens India's understanding of its own past. The current plan also sidelines the mandate of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and abandons The Sarnath Initiative, guidelines devised by the ASI, the Getty Trust, U.S., the British Museum, and National Culture Fund to safe keep excavated objects and present them to visitors in an engaging manner.

Second, many monuments selected for the scheme — including the stupas at Sanchi, the Brihadeshwar temple in Thanjavur, and Akbar's palace city at Fatehpur Sikri — already have tourist infrastructure. What is driving the need for new ticket offices and gift shops?

Further, is it acceptable to let businesses occupy prime public land and build their own brands

— another provision of the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme at the cost of further diminishing grounds around iconic monuments? These grounds are valuable spaces. If excavations are carried out in them, then they may lead to the discovery of antiquities that can offer clues into the historical context of monuments. Primarily for this reason, new construction in these areas has hitherto been prohibited.

Another danger of implementing the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme is that it will undermine local communities and their relationships with historical sites. Guided tours led by employees of large businesses who have received permission to adopt a monument may endanger livelihoods of those who have lived near the site and made a living by regaling visitors with stories of its colourful past. The potential of big businesses to underwrite a monument’s illumination is also troubling. Keeping these spots open from dawn to dusk has limited footfall and thus preserved them from excessive wear and tear. Night tourism will also pull electricity away from rural homesteads and hospitals.

Many monuments selected for the ‘Adopt a Heritage’ scheme are on ASI lists and are therefore protected by the just named central agency. Others chosen for the scheme are protected by the Archaeology Directorate of the State that they are located in. However, there are some monuments selected for the scheme that are not protected by the ASI and are in States without Archaeology Directorates. One fears that businesses that sign agreements with the Union Ministry of Culture to adopt these monuments will be able to alter their historical character without much opposition.

Implementing the scheme holds forth another danger: what will happen to monuments not adopted by Monument Mitras in the predetermined time frame? According to media reports, the Uttar Pradesh government has started turning over such monuments to the Tourism Department to convert them into hotels. They include Chunar Fort, a citadel overlooking Barwasagar Lake, and several residences built by Awadh’s Nawabs. The U.P. government’s decision confirms that despite now being housed under the Ministry of Culture rather than the Ministry of Tourism, the scheme is continuing to place reckless tourism and corporate interests over historical preservation. These two Ministries have long been entwined. Even today, they are led by the same cabinet Minister.

What might Corporate India instead do to look after the nation’s built heritage? First, businesses can help citizens understand why monuments matter. This can be done by earmarking CSR funds for grants for researching, writing, and publishing high quality textbooks, and developing imaginative and effective ways of teaching history. Traders and shopkeepers can give funds to school libraries for collecting archival materials including books, maps, and old photographs relevant to monuments in their vicinity that will lead students to establish the value of monuments.

Corporates might also follow the lead taken by Sudha Murthy and N.R. Narayana Murthy in giving gifts to organisations such as the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune to continue their missions of writing history by rationally coordinating the textual record and the archaeological evidence. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, humanities and social sciences departments at some universities have been witnessing a hiring freeze. At other universities, these departments are being amalgamated. Corporates can give them a new lease of life by instituting fellowships, endowing professorships, and supporting research training programmes.

Second, industrial houses can support the meaningful conservation of heritage buildings by looking within. Their CSR funds can be used to purchase new equipment that release fewer noxious gases that darken and corrode marble buildings and discharge fewer effluents into

rivers, thus making these water bodies less likely to serve as breeding grounds of microbes that gather on the walls of ancient buildings erected on riverbanks and cause their decay.

In the past, Tata Sons, ONGC, and other companies have regularly contributed funds to organisations training individuals in much needed restoration skills and creating jobs for them. Now is the time for corporations to support interdisciplinary teams at the Development and Research Organisation for Nature, Arts and Heritage (DRONAH) Foundation and the Centre for Advancement of Traditional Building Technology and Skills that are trying to protect monuments from emergent threats such as climate change. Rising sea levels are leading to water percolation into forts along Maharashtra's coast. Salination is eating into their foundations. Higher rainfall is leading Ladakh's stucco houses to crumble. Greater fluctuations in temperature are peeling away Shekhawati's murals. The private sector's resources and expertise may also help the ASI and State Archaeology Directorates to secure monuments from dams, mining projects, defacement, and looting.

Currently, India's progress in diverse fields is being projected at G-20 events across the nation. By embracing forward-thinking principles of historical preservation, businesses, government agencies, and civil society groups can showcase India's genuine progress in this arena. Maybe their efforts will inspire more citizens to participate in the pressing task of safeguarding India's pluralistic heritage.

Nachiket Chanchani is an Associate Professor of South Asian Art and Visual Culture at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, U.S.

COMMENTS

SHARE

[monument and heritage site](#) / [archaeology](#) / [conservation](#) / [history and culture](#) / [teaching and learning](#) / [tourism](#) / [business \(general\)](#) / [government](#) / [Tamil Nadu](#) / [Uttar Pradesh](#) / [Coronavirus](#) / [G20](#)

BACK TO TOP

Comments have to be in English, and in full sentences. They cannot be abusive or personal. Please abide by our [community guidelines](#) for posting your comments.

We have migrated to a new commenting platform. If you are already a registered user of The Hindu and logged in, you may continue to engage with our articles. If you do not have an account please register and login to post comments. Users can access their older comments by logging into their accounts on Vuukle.

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com