

Ministry of Culture

India and United States of America sign the first ever 'Cultural Property Agreement'

CPA aims to prevent illegal trafficking of cultural property and retrieval of antiquarian objects to their place of origin

Out of 358 Repatriated Indian Antiquities, 345 retrieved in last One Decade

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The Government of India and the Government of the United States of America signed the first ever 'Cultural Property Agreement' to prevent and curb the illicit trafficking of antiquities from India to the USA, today, the 26th July, 2024 on the sidelines of the 46th World Heritage Committee, at Bharat Mandapam, New Delhi. The agreement was signed by Shri Govind Mohan, Secretary, Ministry of Culture and H.E. Eric Garcetti, Ambassador of the United States of America to India in the august presence of Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat.





The Cultural Property Agreement (CPA) is aligned with the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, to which both countries are States party. The Illicit trafficking of cultural property is a longstanding issue that has affected many cultures and countries throughout history. A large number of antiquities have been smuggled out of Bharat before the ratification of 1970 UNESCO Convention, and which are now housed in various museums, institutions and private collections across the world.

Speaking on the occasion, Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said that the CPA is another step towards securing India's rich and diverse cultural heritage and invaluable artifacts of our grand history. It is the beginning of a new chapter to prevent the illegal trafficking of cultural property and retrieval of antiquarian objects to their place of origin.

The Minister emphasized that preservation and protection of the Indian artefacts and cultural heritage has emerged as an integral component of India's foreign policy over the last decade. The Government of India, under the leadership of Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi has been committed towards this issue, and has adopted a proactive approach towards bringing back Indian artifacts from various parts of the world. **India has repatriated 358 antiquities since 1976, out of these 345 have been retrieved since 2014**, the Minister informed.



Union Minister highlighted that under India's G20 Presidency, the 'Protection and Promotion of Cultural Property' emerged as one of the main topical priorities reflecting the core concerns of the Culture Sector globally, particularly those of the Global South. The Kashi Culture Pathway', the Outcome Document of the G20 Culture Working Group unanimously endorsed and called for a strengthened and effective global coalition to bolster the fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural property. This commitment of the membership to strengthen the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property at national, regional or international levels to enable its return and restitution to their countries and communities of origin was reiterated in the New Delhi's Leaders' Declaration (NDLD) in 2023.

The Minister further stated that Cultural Property agreement signed between India and the United States of America today is a culmination of year-long bi-lateral discussions and negotiations held on the sidelines of the G20 Culture Working Group Meetings, and the groundbreaking endorsement of "culture as a standalone goal" in the post 2030 development framework in the New Delhi's Leaders' Declaration (NDLD), marking a paradigm shift in the global development strategy. This historic milestone of the 'Culture goal' underscoring the impact of culture on social inclusion and economic

growth, galvanizing global action to nurture creativity, intercultural dialogue, and empowering marginalized communities, safeguarding vulnerable heritage and fostering resilient and inclusive societies.



Shri Shekhawat said that the subject of repatriation is not merely a moral imperative but also a practical investment in cultural diplomacy and sustainable development. By returning artifacts to their countries of origin, we nurture cultural stewardship, promote tourism, and stimulate economic growth within local communities. This process empowers nations to leverage their cultural assets for educational enrichment, social cohesion, and economic empowerment, thereby fostering inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

The Minister emphasized that India's Cultural Creative Economy offers a blueprint for leveraging heritage and creativity for the greater good, benefiting not just India but the entire world by promoting cross-cultural understanding and sustainable development. The Prime Ministers' vision of 'Vikas Bhi, Virasat Bhi' and the Viksit Bharat Vision 2047 endorse the endless possibilities of the Cultural Creative Economy to foster vibrant and inclusive ecosystems, unlock new pathways of growth and sustainability and transform our economies and societies while preserving our cultural heritage.

The Minister further informed that the Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, during his visit to USA on 22-23 June, 2023 conveyed his deep appreciation for the repatriation of Indian antiquities from the United States of America. Both the state parties expressed their strong interest in working expeditiously toward a Cultural Property Agreement aimed at preventing illegal trafficking of cultural heritage and enhancing cooperation between the two nations. **As many as 262 antiquities were handed over to India by the USA on the occasion of this State visit.**

Speaking on the occasion, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Shri Govind Mohan said that this agreement symbolizes not the strength of our bilateral relations but also a significant step forward in our joint efforts to safeguarding the treasures that embody our collective history, identity, and heritage. It is a testament to our commitment to ensuring that these invaluable artifacts remain in their rightful contexts and are preserved for the benefit of future generations.

About the Agreement

In 2022, the Government of India and the Government of the United States of America came on one stage to explore the possibility of strengthening bi-lateral ties under Article 9 of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. In pursuance of these deliberations, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) India sent a Diplomatic Note to the USA counterpart which was positively received and responded to by the US counterpart through a diplomatic note on 16th March, 2023 to suggest procedures for entering into an agreement. These steps included the determinations regarding the safeguard of cultural property and international cooperation in the field of the preservation and safeguarding of archaeological and ethnological materials. The historical, cultural, legal situation and possibilities of cooperation was documented in the Statement of Fact, and various meetings and discussions were held on approbation by both the parties. During the process an NGO 'Antiquity Coalition' has also played a vital role.

The CPA restricts the importation into the United States of certain archaeological material ranging in date from 1.7 million years ago through 1770 CE and certain ethnological material, which may include categories of civic, religious, and royal architectural material, religious material and ceremonial items, and manuscripts ranging in date from 2nd century BCE to 1947 CE. The list of such items restricted for import in the United States of America will be promulgated by the Government of the United States of America. As per the agreement, the United States of America shall offer to return to India any object or material on the Designate List forfeited to the Government of the United States of America.

The Agreement shall be helpful in quick seizure of Indian antiquities at US Customs and their repatriation back to India. It is to be noted that USA has already executed agreement with countries like -Algeria, Belize, Bolivia, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Greece, Guatemala, Honduras, Italy, Jordan, Mali, Morocco, Peru and Turkey.

The exhibition *Re(ad)address: Return of Treasures* as part of the 46th World heritage Committee initiates an open and inclusive dialogue on the long contested historical and global issue of repatriation and restitution of cultural property through an object based exhibition. This display highlights the journey of 25 repatriated Indian objects, and the multitude of stories surrounding their successful return. The exhibition addresses the problem of illicit trafficking of antiquities and global efforts made in the direction of repatriation of cultural property. The exhibition was inaugurated by the Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi with Ms Audrey Azoulay on 21 July, 2024, and is open for public view at Bharat mandapam.

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