



Role of district administration in archaeological governance: Challenges and opportunities in India

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Abstract

This paper explores the role of district administrations in managing and protecting India's archaeological heritage. It highlights how district officials work with national and state authorities, as well as local communities and NGOs, to preserve historical sites and monuments. The paper discusses the challenges faced by district administrations, such as limited resources, coordination issues, political pressures, and conflicts over cultural or religious significance of heritage sites. Through case studies, it shows how these challenges impact the protection of important sites. The paper also offers solutions to improve archaeological governance at the district level, such as clearer legal frameworks, better resource allocation, and stronger collaboration between all stakeholders. By focusing on these opportunities, the paper aims to provide recommendations to enhance the role of district administrations in preserving India's rich cultural heritage for future generations.

Keywords: District administration, archaeological governance, heritage protection, encroachment, conservation, coordination

Introduction

Archaeological governance in India is about managing, protecting, and promoting the country's historical heritage, including monuments, artifacts, and ancient sites. It started in 1861 when the British established the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which became the main body responsible for managing and conserving archaeological sites. Each state has its own archaeological department, which works alongside the ASI, while district administrations also play an important role in the day-to-day protection of these sites. Non-governmental organizations like INTACH and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture help with conservation and raising awareness about the importance of heritage. There are laws, such as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958), that guide the management and protection of these sites.

This study holds significant importance as it addresses the often-overlooked role of district administrations in archaeological governance. While national and state-level agencies like the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) play a prominent role, district administrations act as the first responders to challenges such as illegal encroachments, monument degradation, and inadequate heritage management. By understanding the responsibilities, limitations, and opportunities faced by district administrations, this research aims to provide actionable policy recommendations to enhance heritage preservation at the grassroots level. Additionally, examining the collaborative dynamics between district, state, and central authorities will offer insights into strengthening intergovernmental relations for effective archaeological governance in India.

District administrations are key players in the governance and protection of archaeological sites in India. They are responsible for ensuring that monuments and historical sites within their areas are protected and maintained. They work closely with the ASI and state archaeological departments to monitor and safeguard these sites. District officials also help prevent illegal activities like looting and illegal excavation, and they manage the records of archaeological sites. They ensure that construction projects do not harm protected

heritage sites by regulating nearby development. In addition, they raise public awareness by organizing programs to educate local communities about the importance of preserving these sites. They also collaborate with NGOs to support conservation efforts at the local level.

To manage and protect archaeological heritage effectively, it's important for different levels of government to work together. Many heritage sites are located in areas that involve both state and district authorities, so cooperation between the central, state, and district governments is necessary. The ASI oversees national heritage, but state and district authorities manage local sites. When it comes to issues like protecting monuments from illegal activities or urban development, local administrations are often the first to respond and work with higher authorities to act. Working together, governments can also ensure that development projects near heritage sites don't damage them. Partnerships between the government and NGOs, like INTACH or AKTC, are also helpful in bringing in extra knowledge, resources, and expertise to support conservation efforts.

Vice Chairman, DDAs	Superintendent of Police	District Collector	Municipal Commissioner
	Addl. SP	Chief Development Officer / Additional District Magistrate	
	Circle Officers/DSPs	Sub Divisional Magistrates	
		Tehsildars / Naib Tehsildars (Executive Magistrates)	
		Revenue Inspector / Kanungo(s) /	

Fig 1: Structure of District Administration (Based on Uttar Pradesh Setup)

This figure represents the hierarchical structure of district administration in Uttar Pradesh, focusing on the key stakeholders involved in archaeological governance.

It highlights the direct involvement of district magistrates in coordinating with state archaeological departments and the ASI. The presence of multiple administrative layers emphasizes the need for better communication and streamlined decision-making to mitigate delays in site management.

Importance of Inter-Governmental Collaboration

Intergovernmental collaboration is essential for effective

archaeological governance in India, as it ensures that efforts to protect and preserve cultural heritage are coordinated across different levels of government. Archaeological sites and monuments often span multiple jurisdictions, and their management requires seamless cooperation between the central, state, and district governments. This collaboration helps in addressing challenges such as resource allocation, legal enforcement, and the implementation of conservation policies.

Table 1: Hierarchical Comparison of Archaeological Governance at District Level

Archaeological Survey of India (Circle Level)	State/District Archaeological Departments	District Administration
Superintending Archaeologist	Regional Archaeological Officer	District Magistrate/Collector
Dy Superintending Archaeologist	District Archaeological Officer	Dy Collector
Asst Superintending Archaeologist	Assistant Director	Executive Magistrate/ Tehsildar
Assistant Archaeologist		Revenue Inspector

This table provides a comparative overview of the administrative responsibilities at the district level across different states. It highlights the variations in the delegation of authority and resource allocation. States with dedicated heritage cells report quicker resolution of encroachment issues, demonstrating the importance of localized decision-making. The table underscores the need for capacity-building initiatives to strengthen districtlevel governance.

At the central level, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is the primary body responsible for the conservation of national heritage sites. However, many heritage sites are located at the state or district level, requiring active involvement from state archaeological departments and local authorities to ensure their protection and preservation. By working together, these different governmental bodies can share resources, knowledge, and expertise to improve the overall management of archaeological sites.

Collaboration is particularly important when dealing with issues such as the protection of monuments from encroachment, illegal excavation, and the impact of urbanization. Local district administrations, for example, are often the first to identify threats to heritage sites and can work with state and central agencies to take appropriate action. State governments, with their regional knowledge, can support the enforcement of national laws, while the central government can provide technical assistance, funding, and policy guidance.

Another important aspect of intergovernmental collaboration is the integration of archaeological preservation with broader urban planning and development. When large-scale infrastructure projects are proposed near heritage sites, cooperation between the local administration, state governments, and central authorities is necessary to ensure that development does not harm historical landmarks. This can involve adjusting construction plans, setting up buffer zones around heritage sites, or halting projects that pose significant risks to the integrity of the monuments.

Intergovernmental collaboration also extends to the involvement of other stakeholders, such as NGOs, research institutions, and international organizations. For example, partnerships between the central government, state authorities, and organizations like INTACH or the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) can lead to more effective conservation efforts, as these NGOs bring in specialized knowledge, expertise, and additional resources. Through

coordinated efforts, government agencies and NGOs can ensure that heritage conservation is not only technically sound but also sustainable in the long term.

Research Objectives

- To assess the role of district administration in the management and protection of archaeological heritage in India.
- To identify and analyze the challenges faced by district authorities in enforcing archaeological governance at the local level.
- To explore the potential for enhancing intergovernmental collaboration in the preservation and management of archaeological sites.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing legislative frameworks and policies in archaeological governance at the district level.
- To propose actionable recommendations for improving district-level archaeological governance and heritage conservation practices.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to evaluate the role of district administrations in archaeological governance. The methodology comprises three key components:

1. Data Collection

Primary data was gathered through structured interviews with district officials, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) representatives, and state archaeology department officers. Secondary data sources included government reports, legal documents, policy guidelines, and scholarly articles. Right to Information (RTI) responses were also analyzed to gain insights into administrative actions at the district level.

2. Case Study Selection

Case studies were selected based on regions with a significant presence of heritage sites and reported cases of encroachment or governance challenges. Notable examples include sites in Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Madhya Pradesh.

The study emphasizes comparative analysis by assessing the effectiveness of district administrations in both urban and rural contexts.

3. Data Analysis

A thematic analysis approach was applied to identify recurring patterns and key themes in the governance challenges faced by district administrations.

The role of intergovernmental coordination, policy implementation gaps, and the effectiveness of legal enforcement were analyzed.

The combination of qualitative insights from interviews and quantitative data from official reports ensures a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing archaeological governance at the district level.

Conceptual Framework

Archaeological governance, in a decentralized manner, refers to the system in which the management, preservation, and regulation of archaeological sites and heritage are distributed across various levels of government, primarily at the local, district, and state levels, alongside central authorities. While the central government, through bodies like the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), sets the broad legislative and policy framework, it is the district and state administrations that take on a more hands-on role in the day-to-day protection and management of local heritage sites. This decentralized approach means that local governments are responsible for enforcing national heritage laws, managing conservation efforts, addressing illegal excavation and trafficking of antiquities, and handling community engagement. District administrations, for example, are often the first to identify and act on threats to local heritage, such as encroachment or neglect, while state governments manage resources for conservation and tourism. Moreover, local authorities often collaborate with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups to strengthen conservation efforts, raise awareness, and ensure that heritage sites are preserved in a way that aligns with local needs and priorities. This decentralized system allows for more tailored and context-specific management of archaeological resources, addressing both national objectives and local challenges in heritage governance.

Legal and Constitutional Framework

District administrations play a key role in managing archaeological heritage at the local level, acting as the link between national policies and local action. While the central and state governments create laws, district administrations ensure their implementation on the ground. Key laws such as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (1958) protect sites of national importance, regulating activities like excavation and construction near protected monuments. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act (1972) addresses the illegal trade of cultural artifacts. States have their own laws to protect heritage, and local bodies like district administrations monitor and manage heritage sites, ensuring no encroachment or misuse. Local governance acts and environmental laws also play a role in safeguarding cultural resources, especially in ecologically sensitive areas. Additionally, India's participation in international agreements like the UNESCO World Heritage Convention strengthens its commitment to preserving globally significant heritage sites.

Role of District Administration in Archaeological Governance

District administration plays a crucial role in the management, conservation, and promotion of archaeological

sites at the local level, acting as a bridge between national policies and their local implementation. The district magistrate or collector leads these efforts, ensuring that national and state policies, laws, and regulations regarding heritage protection are effectively enforced. Their responsibilities are multifaceted, encompassing site management, policy enforcement, community engagement, and coordination with other stakeholders.

At the core, district administrations are responsible for identifying, documenting, and protecting local heritage sites in collaboration with the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and state archaeological departments. They monitor the condition of archaeological sites, prevent encroachment or illegal excavation, and regulate construction near protected sites to ensure these areas remain undisturbed. The district administration also oversees the allocation of funding for conservation and restoration projects, coordinating with experts, NGOs, and local communities to implement best practices in site preservation.

In terms of policy enforcement, the district administration plays a pivotal role in ensuring compliance with laws such as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act (AMASR), 1958. Under Section 6, the district collector is involved in facilitating agreements between the government and the owners of protected monuments to ensure proper maintenance and public access. Section 16 tasks the district collector with safeguarding religious sites that are also protected monuments, ensuring they are not misused, desecrated, or polluted, and that their sanctity is preserved. Section 21 requires the district collector to be notified prior to any excavation activities in protected areas, ensuring these activities are conducted lawfully and without harm to the site.

Further, Section 26 of the AMASR Act outlines the collector's role in facilitating the acquisition of antiquities by the central government if they are at risk of destruction or misuse. Similarly, under the Indian Treasure Trove Act, 1878, the district collector manages the process of handling discovered treasures, ensuring legal procedures are followed, and facilitating the fair resolution of ownership claims. The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 also requires the district collector to oversee the protection and acquisition of significant cultural items, with the authority to ensure proper possession and, if necessary, take possession by force to safeguard the nation's heritage.

The district administration is also responsible for fostering public awareness and community involvement in heritage conservation. They organize educational programs, heritage walks, and tourism initiatives, encouraging local communities to take ownership of and actively participate in the preservation of their cultural heritage. By collaborating with NGOs like INTACH and AKTC, district administrations leverage external expertise and resources to further strengthen conservation efforts.

There is also the establishment of Village Heritage Committees under the District Archaeology Association. For example, in Bilaspur district, the Village Heritage Committee is set up under the chairmanship of the district collector. This committee plays a crucial role in local heritage conservation, working closely with district administrations, ASI, and community members to protect and preserve local archaeological sites. These committees are instrumental in raising awareness, ensuring that heritage sites are maintained, and preventing encroachments, while also fostering collaboration between local communities and government authorities in preserving cultural heritage.

Table 2: Role of District Administration in Archaeological Governance

Role	Description	Related Legislation/Acts
Identification and Protection of Archaeological Sites	The District Administration plays a crucial role in identifying and protecting archaeological sites within their jurisdiction. This includes overseeing the preservation of monuments and artifacts.	- The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act, 1958) - The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules, 1959
Awareness and Public Engagement	The administration conducts public awareness campaigns to educate local populations about the importance of preserving archaeological heritage.	
Issuance of Notices for Encroachment	The Superintending Archaeologist issues eviction notices/orders and show cause notices under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (Sections 19(2) and 38(2) of the Rules). The Collector plays a critical role in assisting with encroachment removal by issuing eviction orders and coordinating with the police, and State Government.	Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorized Occupants) Act, 1971. Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (Amendment and Validation) Act, 2010
Coordinating with ASI and Other Agencies	The district authorities act as a link between the Archaeological Survey of India, the state government, and local stakeholders to facilitate effective governance of archaeological sites.	
Facilitating Conservation Efforts	The district administration may allocate resources for the conservation and restoration of historical monuments, collaborating with the ASI and conservation experts.	- The National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), 2007
Assessment of market value or compensation	The Collector in archaeological governance is responsible for assessing the market value and compensation for antiquities acquired by the Central Government, following the The Collector is assisted by two assessors (one from the government and one from the owner) and ensures compensation is paid.	Land Acquisition Act, 1894. Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013
Purchase of antiquities by the Central Government	The Collector's role is to issue notices for the compulsory acquisition of antiquities, ensure ownership transfer to the Central Government, and facilitate preservation of historically or archaeologically significant items.	The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972
Excavation Permission	An archaeological officer or licensed person may excavate in protected or non-protected areas after notifying the Collector and the owner, with prior written notice.	AMASR ACT
To compulsorily acquire antiquities and art treasures	The Central Government can compulsorily acquire antiquities or art treasures for preservation, and the Collector must notify the owner and take possession, using necessary force if needed.	The Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972
Acquire Treasure of the Nation	The Collector under the Indian Treasure-Trove Act, 1878 is responsible for receiving notice of discovered treasure, conducting inquiries to determine ownership, issuing public notifications, and ensuring the lawful disposal or division of the treasure. The Collector also has the authority to acquire treasure on behalf of the government, enforce penalties for violations, and exercise Civil Court powers for the proceedings under the Act. Their decisions are final and binding, and they manage disputes regarding treasure ownership.	Indian Treasure-Trove Act, 1878

Challenges Faced by District Administration

The district administration faces several challenges in archaeological governance, impacting its ability to effectively manage, conserve, and promote archaeological sites and artifacts. These challenges include policy and jurisdictional conflicts, resource constraints, coordination gaps, and lack of local-level awareness.

- **Policy and Jurisdictional Conflicts:** One of the primary challenges faced by district administrations is the overlapping jurisdiction of various authorities, such as the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), state archaeological departments, local governments, and other stakeholders. The central and state governments often have different policies and priorities regarding

archaeological conservation, leading to confusion and delays in decision-making. Additionally, there can be disagreements over which agency should be responsible for the protection and management of specific sites, especially when a site has both archaeological and religious significance. The lack of clear, unified policies or directives can create jurisdictional conflicts that hinder effective governance.

- **Political Pressure and Interference:** Political influence on decision-making regarding monuments, impacting impartial governance.

Example: Taj Mahal, Agra – Local politicians have at times attempted to influence the narrative surrounding the Taj

Mahal, claiming it was originally a Hindu temple, despite its well-documented Mughal history. The district administration, under political pressure, has faced challenges in defending the monument's heritage status while managing protests and public sentiments stirred by political leaders.

- **Religious and Cultural Sensitivity:** District administrators often face the challenge of balancing religious and cultural sentiments with the legal and archaeological frameworks when managing ancient monuments. Local communities may have deep-rooted emotional and historical connections to monuments, leading to disputes over their identity and use. Administrators must navigate these sensitivities while ensuring the protection and conservation of heritage sites.

Example: In Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh, the local Hindu community demanded permission to worship at the ASI-protected Bijamandal mosque, claiming it was a Hindu temple, the Vijaya temple. The district collector, Buddhesh Kumar Vaid, adhered to the ASI's 1951 gazette notification, which identified the structure as a mosque, and refused the request. This decision led to a significant religious and cultural dispute, with the local community feeling their cultural rights were disregarded. The issue escalated with political intervention and legal threats, highlighting the difficulty of managing such sensitive matters at the district level.

- **Coordination Gaps:** Effective archaeological governance requires coordination among multiple stakeholders, including central and state governments, local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), local communities, and the private sector. However, coordination between these entities is often weak. The district administration may struggle to bring together all relevant parties to work collaboratively on heritage protection and conservation. Differences in priorities, communication barriers, and lack of formal mechanisms for inter-agency coordination can lead to fragmented efforts and missed opportunities

for synergy. This can result in overlapping activities, duplication of efforts, or uncoordinated initiatives that hinder the overall effectiveness of archaeological governance.

Case Study

A conflict arose between the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the district administration during a tourism workshop in Malda. ASI's Bimal Bandopadhyay accused the local administration of failing to support excavation efforts in Gour, citing issues like worker recruitment problems, threats from local goons, and a lack of law enforcement. He warned that without help, ASI might withdraw from the site, leading to the loss of historical heritage. In response, district magistrate Ashok Bala and other officials denied the accusations, asserting that the administration had provided support and that crime was not preventing tourism.

They also emphasized the presence of a mobile police team. The disagreement highlighted coordination and communication failures between local authorities and the ASI, hampering effective heritage preservation. (Source-The Telegraph, Published 20.09.04, 12:00 AM,)

- **Local-Level Awareness:** Another significant challenge is the lack of awareness about the importance of preserving cultural heritage among local communities. Local populations may not fully understand the significance of archaeological sites or the need for their protection. In some cases, communities may view heritage sites as obstacles to development or may engage in activities like encroachment, illegal construction, or unauthorized excavations. The district administration faces difficulty in educating and involving local communities in heritage conservation efforts. Without proper awareness, there is little community support for preservation initiatives, and local resistance can delay or obstruct conservation work.

Case Study

An example of local-level challenges in archaeological governance is seen in the case of the Sambhal mosque, where the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) faced significant difficulties in carrying out its duties due to local opposition. The ASI was unable to inspect the mosque, which has been a protected monument since 1920, due to the fear of protests from local groups. In 2018, when the ASI attempted to intervene in a construction project at the mosque, officials were threatened and forced to leave, leading to the filing of a FIR under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958. Despite an order for the removal of the construction, it was never implemented. The situation underscores the challenges faced by ASI in protecting and preserving heritage sites when local resistance, lack of cooperation, and security concerns hinder their efforts to carry out inspections and enforce preservation laws.



Sambhal district administration officials resolving the Sambhal Mosque Issues

Table 3: Instances of Encroachment Removal from Archaeological Sites by District Administrations

Location	Archaeological Site	Encroachment Details	Action Taken	Outcome
Sambhal, Uttar Pradesh	Jama Masjid, Firozpur Fort, Saundhan Fort, Chandeshwar Tirth, Berani Temple, Gumthal Memorial	Encroachments identified around six protected monuments.	ASI team conducted inspections; district authorities ordered removal of encroachments.	Ongoing efforts to clear encroachments; ASI to submit reports for further action. The Statesman
Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Chhota Imambara, Kazmain, Rumi Gate, Bada Imambara, Picture Gallery, Shahnajaf Imambara	Approximately 200 encroachments reported in 25 of 60 centrally protected monuments.	Committee formed to identify and remove encroachments; consensus reached on 50 encroachments in six sites.	Awaiting tangible results on the ground; heritage activists hopeful for prompt action. Times of India
Hisar, Haryana	Ther, Rakhi Khas, Rakhi Shahpur villages	Encroachments on archaeological sites.	District administration-initiated removal of encroachments; approximately 25 acres freed in April 2018.	Ongoing efforts to clear encroachments; infrastructure plans for displaced families. Times of India
Delhi	Tughlaqabad Fort	Encroachments by unauthorized structures.	ASI began demolition drive; over 1,000 structures identified for removal.	Demolition of at least 50 structures reported; ongoing efforts to clear encroachments. Hindustan Times
Agra, Uttar Pradesh	Taj Mahal vicinity	248 new illegals constructions between 2015 and 2022, some as close as 50 meters to the monument.	ASI and local authorities-initiated action to remove illegal constructions.	Ongoing efforts to preserve the monument's integrity; further actions anticipated. Economic Times

Opportunities for Improvement

There are several opportunities for improving the role of district administration in archaeological governance, which could enhance the management, conservation, and promotion of cultural heritage sites. These opportunities include strengthening policy frameworks, increasing resource allocation, fostering better coordination among stakeholders, and improving public awareness and engagement.

▪ **Improved Legal Framework and Enforcement**

Opportunity: Strengthening legal protections for archaeological sites and monuments can enhance governance. Streamlining the process for declaring monuments as protected sites and providing clarity on legal procedures can reduce disputes and delays.

Action: Amending existing laws to clarify the rights and responsibilities of the district administration, ASI, and local authorities in managing heritage sites can mitigate issues related to ownership disputes, encroachments, and site degradation.

Example: The GyanVapi Mosque issue in Varanasi could have been addressed more efficiently if there was clearer legal guidance for the district administration on handling such religious and cultural disputes over heritage sites, balancing respect for all communities while safeguarding the monument's historical value.

▪ **Increasing Resource Allocation:** Resource constraints can significantly hinder the effectiveness of archaeological governance. Increased financial support from both state and central governments is necessary to address the infrastructure needs of archaeological sites, such as conservation facilities, research, and skilled manpower. District administrations can advocate for the allocation of specific funds for the protection of cultural heritage and ensure that the necessary resources are

provided for regular site monitoring, maintenance, and restoration efforts. Investing in training programs for district-level staff in conservation practices, archaeology, and heritage management is another important opportunity for improvement.

For example, The Pune District Planning Development Committee allocated ₹30 crore in 2023 for the conservation of key archaeological sites.

▪ **Fostering Better Coordination Among Stakeholders:**

To overcome the challenges posed by coordination gaps, district administrations can play a leading role in facilitating stronger collaboration between central and state authorities, local bodies, and NGOs. Establishing formal mechanisms for interagency communication, such as coordination committees or task forces, can ensure that all stakeholders are working towards common objectives. Collaboration with NGOs like INTACH (Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage) and AKTC (Aga Khan Trust for Culture) could enhance expertise in site management and conservation while involving local communities in decision-making processes. This would also help in aligning efforts and ensuring that initiatives do not conflict or duplicate each other. For example, The Maharashtra government formed a district-level committee to address the encroachment of historical forts, with the District Collector leading the initiative and involving various local authorities (Police, Forest, ASI, etc.).

▪ **Collaboration with Local NGOs for Conservation and Awareness**

Solution: Partnering with local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that specialize in heritage conservation or community outreach can help mobilize resources, improve awareness, and ensure better monitoring and management of archaeological sites.

Action: District administrations can identify and partner with NGOs that have expertise in heritage conservation and environmental management to co-manage important heritage sites. This will also help in ensuring sustainable tourism practices.

Example: The Kumbh Mela at Prayagraj, though not an archaeological site, benefits from partnerships with NGOs that help manage large-scale events and awareness. A similar approach could be used in historical sites like the Qutub Minar in Delhi, where local NGOs could help with education and crowd management.

▪ **Creating Incentives for Private Sector Participation**

Solution: Encouraging private sector investments in heritage site management and conservation by offering incentives like tax rebates or branding opportunities. This

would create a sustainable financial model for archaeological governance.

Action: The district administration can partner with private firms, especially in tourism and hospitality, to sponsor conservation efforts or develop heritage sites. Creating a model that incentivizes corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding for monuments could provide necessary resources for upkeep.

Example: The Taj Mahal, one of India's most famous landmarks, could benefit from greater private sector participation in conservation efforts through CSR funding. Companies involved in tourism or hospitality could contribute by maintaining amenities, monitoring visitor behavior, or supporting restoration projects.

Table 4: Case Studies Related to District Collector’s Role in Archaeological Governance

Case Study	Location	Date	Summary/Key Role of District Collector
Collector Invites Public for Archaeology Walk to Rock Paintings	Krishna Gori, Tamil Nadu	May 08, 2023	The District Collector organized a public archaeology walk to promote awareness of rock paintings at the Kallakuriki Bhairavar temple, collaborating with multiple departments. Ensured coordination among departments and encouraged public participation.
Collector Directs to Stop Archaeological Survey in Idukki	Idukki, Kerala	August 02, 2023	The District Collector suspended a survey on Iron Age remains after public protests. Acted as a mediator to address local concerns about potential evictions, ensuring transparency and communication between authorities and residents.
Preserving Maharashtra’s Heritage: DistrictLevel Committees to Tackle Fort Encroachments	Maharashtra	January 18, 2025	District Collectors led committees to combat encroachments on historic forts. Coordinated efforts with the police, archaeology, and forest departments to remove encroachments and prevent future ones. Supervised timely implementation and accountability.
From Confluence to Conflict: When Archaeological Digs, History, and Faith Collide	Varanasi and Mathura, UP	February 07, 2024	The District Collector in Varanasi ensured compliance with court orders for archaeological surveys at the Gyanvapi Mosque, maintaining law and order and managing sensitive cultural and religious issues. Facilitated the execution of surveys and handled social tensions.
Discovery of Menhirs Throws Light on Prehistoric Cultures in Guntur Region	Guntur, Andhra Pradesh	September 30, 2022	The District Collector supported the discovery of megalithic menhirs near Macherla. Facilitated coordination between archaeologists and local authorities, securing resources for excavation and fostering public interest in the prehistoric cultural heritage of the region.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the significant role that district administrations play in archaeological governance in India. While national and state-level agencies such as the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) establish policies and guidelines, the actual implementation and protection of heritage sites largely depend on district-level authorities. The findings indicate that inadequate resource allocation, poor intergovernmental coordination, and legal challenges continue to hinder effective heritage management. However, successful case studies from states like Tamil Nadu highlight the potential of collaborative approaches involving local governments, NGOs, and communities.

To strengthen archaeological governance, it is recommended that district administrations be equipped with enhanced financial resources, technical expertise, and specialized training. Establishing dedicated heritage cells within district administrations and forming joint monitoring committees can improve response time and ensure better site management. Additionally, legal reforms are necessary

to streamline decision-making processes and expedite action against encroachments.

Future Scope

Further research can explore the effectiveness of emerging technologies like Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and remote sensing in monitoring heritage sites at the district level. Comparative studies across different states can also provide a broader understanding of best practices in archaeological governance. Additionally, longitudinal assessments on the impact of policy interventions can offer valuable insights for future reforms.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Additionally, publicly accessible government reports, RTI responses, and documents from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) were used as data sources.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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