

SAFEGUARDING INDIA'S INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

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The 20th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (20.COM), convened under the UNESCO 2003 Convention, was hosted by the Government of India at the Red Fort (Lal Qila), New Delhi, from 8 to 13 December 2025. The Session marked a historic milestone as it was the first time that India hosted the Intergovernmental Committee under the UNESCO 2003 Convention. It also coincided with the twentieth anniversary of India's ratification of the Convention, reaffirming India's longstanding commitment to safeguarding living heritage and strengthening international cultural cooperation.

The Session witnessed the participation of approximately 1,200 delegates from around 130 countries, including representatives of States Parties, members of the Intergovernmental Committee, UNESCO officials, accredited non-governmental organisations, cultural institutions, experts and community practitioners. It served as an important global platform for policy dialogue, exchange of best practices and international cooperation in the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage.

The principal objectives of hosting the Session were to enhance the global visibility of India's rich and diverse living heritage; showcase its community-based safeguarding practices; contribute to international discussions on intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development; and strengthen India's leadership in international cultural cooperation under the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

A landmark outcome of the Session was the inscription of Deepavali on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. With this inscription, Deepavali became the 16th intangible cultural heritage element from India to be inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Lists. The inscription accorded international recognition to one of India's most significant festivals, reflecting the universal values of harmony, cultural continuity, social cohesion and shared traditions, while reaffirming India's sustained commitment to safeguarding, promoting and transmitting its rich living heritage in accordance with the principles of the UNESCO 2003 Convention.

With the inscription of Deepavali, in December 2025 a total of 16 intangible cultural heritage elements from India have been inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The detailed procedure/mechanism for preparing nomination dossiers are laid down in the Operational Directives of UNESCO 2003 Convention and is available on <https://ich.unesco.org/en/directives>.

Government took a decision to nominate Chhath Mahaparva as Multinational Nomination. Accordingly, amongst other countries Mauritius was also contacted which showed keen interest in joining this Multinational nomination. Thereafter dossier was prepared which included ICH 01

form, movie, consent letters etc. The completed dossier was sent to UNESCO.

Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) which is Nodal Agency for UNESCO nomination for Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) elements, maintains National Inventory on ICH wherein 54 elements are listed and ready for the nomination. However, UNESCO Directive permits only one nomination in two years cycle.

This information was given by Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Shri Gajendra Singh Shekhawat in a written reply in Rajya Sabha today

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