

## **Bulldozers at the Doorstep of History: Kashi Intermodal Station Project and the Threat to Rajghat's Heritage**

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**Abstract:** Rajghat, located at the meeting point of the Ganga and Varuna rivers in Varanasi, is the oldest known settlement of Kashi, with continuous occupation layers dating back to the 8th century BCE. Excavations by archaeologists such as A.K. Narain, T.N. Roy, Krishna Deva, Vidula Jayaswal, and B.R. Mani have revealed Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), terracotta figurines, ring wells, beads, fortification walls, and medieval structures. These finds confirm Rajghat's role as the nucleus from which Kashi developed into a Mahajanapada capital and a great religious centre. Today, however, this heritage is at risk from the Kashi Inter Modal Station (IMS) redevelopment project. Bulldozers and dumpers are cutting through the mound, destroying stratified deposits and reducing valuable artefacts to debris. Official communication under the Right to Information (RTI) from the Archaeological Survey of India, Sarnath Circle, confirms that no NOC was issued for construction within the regulated and prohibited areas of Lal Khan Tomb and the Rajghat archaeological site. Observations from the field indicate ongoing bulldozing and dumping of artefacts along Lal Khan's boundaries, in direct violation of ASI regulations. Furthermore, the ASI-provided site plan reveals that even the existing Namoh Ghat lies within the prohibited area under the AMASR Act, 1958, making current construction legally impermissible. This is not only an irreplaceable cultural loss but also a violation of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958, because the site includes the protected 18th-century Mughal monument, the Tomb of Lal Khan. This paper examines the Rajghat crisis in detail, using excavation data, observations from the construction site, and policy documents. It argues that alternatives for infrastructure development exist at Shivpur and Lohta, where large tracts of railway land are available, but were ignored for political reasons. By comparing Rajghat with global examples from Rome, Athens, and Istanbul, the paper shows how development can be made compatible with heritage conservation. Finally, it proposes solutions such as mandatory Heritage Impact Assessments, relocation of the IMS project, and the creation of a Rajghat Heritage Park. The study concludes that protecting Rajghat is not just about saving ruins but about safeguarding the memory and identity of one of the world's oldest living cities.

**Keywords:** Rajghat; Varanasi; Kashi; Archaeology; Heritage Conservation; AMASR Act; Inter Modal Station; Northern Black Polished Ware; Development vs. Heritage; Urban Politics; India, Heritage Impact Assessment

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## Introduction

At the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Varuna lies Rajghat, the oldest known settlement of Kashi, today's Varanasi. Archaeological excavations at this site have revealed a cultural sequence stretching back to the 8th century BCE, showing how a modest settlement grew into one of the greatest urban and spiritual centres of the subcontinent. Rajghat preserves layers of history in its soil: pottery, terracotta figurines, beads, bricks, fortification walls, and even medieval structures that together tell the story of the city's rise. Scholars such as A.K. Narain, T.N. Roy, Krishna Deva, Vidula Jayaswal, and B.R. Mani have shown through decades of excavations that Rajghat is not just an archaeological mound but the very foundation of Varanasi's history.

Today, this foundation is under grave threat. The Kashi Intermodal Station (IMS) redevelopment project, presented as a major infrastructural leap for the city, is being constructed directly on the Rajghat mound. Bulldozers, dumpers, and JCB machines have cut through stratified deposits that took millennia to form, reducing them to rubble in a matter of hours. Artefacts, ranging from Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) sherds of the early historic period to medieval sculptural fragments, have been dumped as construction waste instead of being carefully studied and preserved.

The destruction at Rajghat is not merely the loss of material culture; it is a direct violation of the law. The Tomb of Lal Khan, an 18th-century Mughal monument located at Rajghat, is a protected site under the *Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958*. This Act strictly prohibits any construction activity within 100 metres of a protected monument and regulates all activities within a 200-metre radius.

Despite these clear legal safeguards, the Kashi Inter Model Station (IMS) Project has been permitted to proceed without obtaining the mandatory *No Objection Certificate (NOC)* from the *National Monuments Authority (NMA)* and the *Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)*. When the author filed a Right to Information (RTI) application to the NMA seeking a copy of the NOC issued for the IMS Project, the NMA transferred the query to the ASI, stating that the matter fell within the latter's jurisdiction. Subsequently, a reply from the ASI, Sarnath Circle, confirmed that **no NOC was ever granted** to the Kashi IMS Project.

This revelation exposes a serious breach of heritage protection laws and raises profound questions. Can India's vision of development progress without erasing the very heritage that defines its identity? Why are alternative sites with ample available land, such as Shivpur and Lohta, continually overlooked? And most importantly, what does the destruction of Rajghat signify for Varanasi's claim as the "world's oldest living city"?

This paper addresses these questions by examining Rajghat's archaeological importance, documenting the heritage loss under the IMS project, analysing the legal and political context of its destruction, and suggesting policy alternatives based on global examples. It argues that true development should build with history, not over it, and that Rajghat must be preserved as a living archive of India's civilisational journey.

## Archaeological Significance of Rajghat

Rajghat is widely recognised as the earliest settlement nucleus of Kashi. Its strategic location at the confluence of the Ganga and Varuna rivers made it a natural site for settlement, trade, and ritual activity. Archaeological investigations here provide evidence of continuous occupation from the 8th century BCE to the medieval period. This makes Rajghat one of the most important urban-archaeological sites in the Gangetic plain.



**Fig. 1: Excavated Ancient Remains at Rajghat**



**Fig. 2: Tomb of Lal Khan (A Centrally Protected Monument)**

### **Excavations and Discoveries**

The first systematic studies of Rajghat were conducted in the 1950s by A.K. Narain of Banaras Hindu University. He identified cultural layers containing Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW), dating between 600 and 300 BCE. NBPW is often considered the marker of early urbanisation in North

India, and its presence at Rajghat confirmed that Kashi had emerged as an important centre during the Mahajanapada period. (Narain & Roy 1976)

Later excavations by T.N. Roy and Krishna Deva revealed structural remains, terracotta figurines, ring wells, and beads, all of which pointed towards a flourishing urban culture. Vidula Jayaswal (2012) emphasised the role of Rajghat in the wider process of urbanisation in the Ganga valley, while B.R. Mani (2008) extended the stratigraphic sequence to show occupation into the early medieval and Sultanate periods. (Jayaswal & Mani 2016)

## Cultural Sequence of Rajghat

**Table 1: Stratigraphic Sequence of Rajghat (Based on Excavation Reports)**

Cultural Period	Approx. Date	Material Evidence	Historical Significance
Pre-NBPW Phase	c. 8th–6th BCE	Grey ware pottery, handmade bowls, crude terracottas	Earliest habitation evidence
NBPW Phase	c. 600–200 BCE	NBPW sherds, punch-marked coins, ring wells, beads	Rise of Mahajanapada Kashi; urbanisation marker
Early Historic	3rd BCE–3rd CE	Terracotta figurines, carnelian beads, brick remains	Expansion of trade, crafts, domestic rituals
Gupta Period	4th–6th CE	Moulded bricks, temple structures, red ware pottery	Consolidation of religious-political authority
Early Medieval	7th–12th CE	Sandstone sculpture fragments, lime-plastered walls	Flourishing of temple architecture
Sultanate–Mughal Period	13th–17th CE	Glazed ware, Islamic coins, Lal Khan's Tomb	Integration into Islamic cultural networks

This sequence demonstrates that Rajghat was never abandoned. Instead, it was continuously inhabited and adapted across different historical periods, making it a living archive of Kashi's civilisation.

## Symbolic Importance

Rajghat is not only important for archaeology but also for cultural memory. The confluence of Ganga and Varuna is described in ancient texts as a sacred crossing (*tirtha*). The material finds from Rajghat therefore complement the city's religious identity, grounding Varanasi's spiritual fame in a tangible archaeological foundation.

## What is IMS Project?

The Kashi Intermodal Station (IMS) Project is a flagship redevelopment initiative of Indian Railways, aimed at transforming the existing Varanasi City railway station at Rajghat into a state-of-the-art transport hub. Planned over nearly 31 acres (As Per DPR of Kashi IMS), the IMS is designed on the model of international airport terminals, integrating multiple modes of transport—railways, city buses, private vehicles, and inland waterways on the Ganga within a single complex. The project envisions modern passenger amenities such as automated ticketing, digital information systems, waiting lounges, commercial and retail spaces, and multi-level parking, with the capacity to handle lakhs of passengers daily. Officially projected as a symbol of “New India's modern infrastructure,” the IMS is marketed as a step toward positioning Varanasi as a global city. However, the choice of Rajghat mound as its site places this project in direct conflict with heritage, since the construction overlaps with an

archaeologically sensitive area and a centrally protected monument, raising fundamental questions about development priorities versus cultural preservation.

### Heritage Lost under the IMS Project

Despite its immense archaeological significance, **Rajghat has become a casualty of the Kashi Inter Modal Station (IMS) Redevelopment Project**. Instead of ensuring the preservation of this ancient mound, the ongoing construction has brutally cut through it.

During multiple site visits in 2025, the author witnessed a deeply distressing scene. Bulldozers, dumpers, and JCB machines were seen tearing through **stratified cultural deposits** that had remained undisturbed for over **two millennia**. The destruction of these archaeological layers represents not just a loss of ancient heritage but an irreversible erasure of the historical narrative of Varanasi itself.



**Figure 3: Image showing bulldozers, dumpers, and JCB machines tearing through stratified deposits at Rajghat**

Artefacts that could have been carefully excavated—pottery, terracotta figurines, beads, ring well fragments, sculptural pieces, were unearthed violently and dumped as debris. Scholars found these objects lying in heaps at nearby dumping grounds. In archaeological terms, this is a catastrophic loss: while the artefacts survive, their context and stratigraphy are destroyed, making it impossible to reconstruct their historical meaning.

Archaeology is not only about finding objects but also about understanding their layer, depth, and association with other finds. Once bulldozers disturb these layers, the scientific value of the material is lost forever. The Rajghat case is therefore not development but archaeological obliteration.

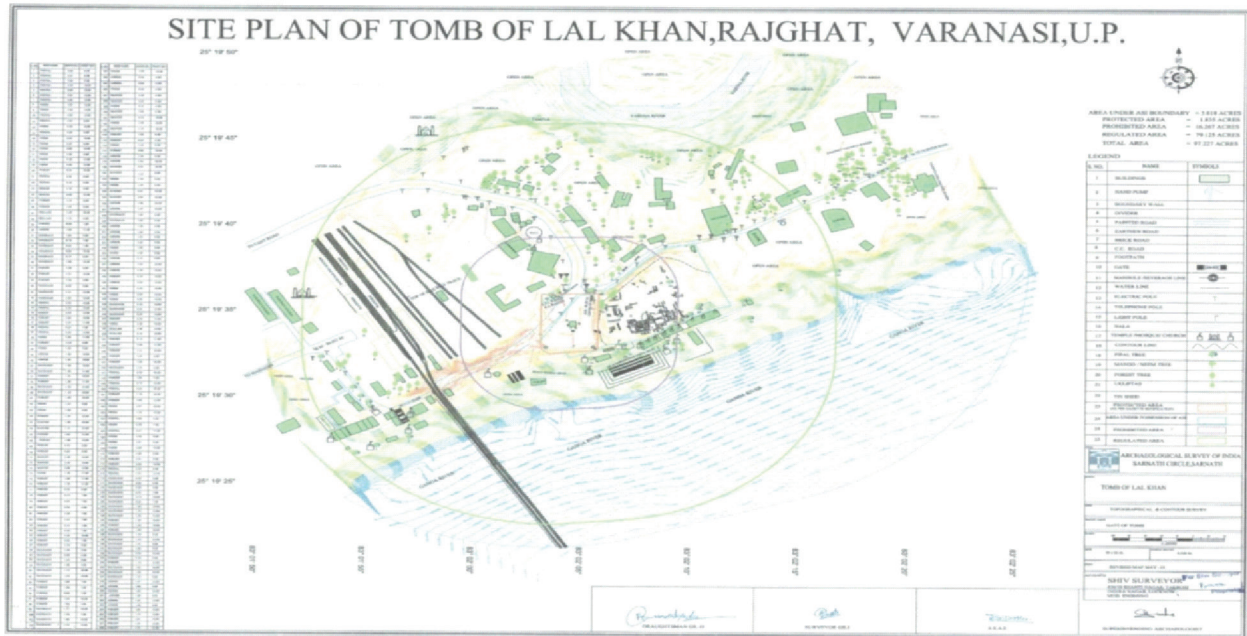
## Material from the Dumping Ground

**Table 2: Artefacts Collected from Rajghat Dumping Grounds (2024–2025)**

Artefact Type	Material	Period (Approx.)	Description / Remarks	Significance
Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW) sherds	Ceramic	600–300 BCE	Glossy pottery fragments with fine finish	Proof of early urbanisation and Mahajanapada Kashi
Terracotta figurines	Terracotta	2nd BCE–2nd CE	Fragmentary human and animal forms	Domestic rituals, cultural practices
Ring well fragments	Fired clay	3rd BCE–1st CE	Circular lining pieces	Urban water management systems
Beads	Carnelian, terracotta, glass	Early Historic–Medieval	Small decorative beads, some unfinished	Evidence of craft production and trade
Bricks (large, moulded)	Burnt clay	Gupta–Medieval	Standardised bricks, some with plaster traces	Remains of temples and urban buildings
Pottery (Red Ware, Grey Ware)	Ceramic	8th BCE–12th CE	Cooking/storage vessels, slipped surfaces	Daily life, continuity of settlement
Sculptural fragments	Sandstone	8th–12th CE	Floral/geom. carvings	Temple or architectural remains
Glazed ware	Ceramic	Sultanate–Mughal (13th–17th CE)	Blue-green glazed pottery shards	Indo-Islamic cultural exchange
Brick rubble, lime plaster	Brick, lime	Medieval	Construction debris	Evidence of structural demolition

This table shows that the dumped artefacts span the full cultural sequence of Rajghat, from early historic to medieval periods. But since they were removed from their archaeological layers, they cannot now contribute to reconstructing Kashi’s development in a scientific way.

The ASI also provided the site plan, which clearly marks construction zones of the IMS project as encroaching prohibited areas. This includes the existing Namo Ghat, confirming that prior heritage-sensitive regulations under the AMASR Act, 1958, have been ignored. These findings highlight not only destruction of archaeological layers but also direct legal violations.



**Figure 4: Site plan of the Tomb of Lal Khan provided by the ASI, Sarnath Circle, indicating that the ongoing construction of the Kashi IMS Project falls within the legally designated Prohibited Area.**

## The Question of Alternatives

The destruction at Rajghat becomes indefensible when we consider that the IMS project could have been built at other sites in Varanasi district without disturbing an archaeologically sensitive zone.

## Shivpur and Lohta Stations

Shivpur Station (Figure 5), located just a few kilometres north of Varanasi city, has ample railway land and fewer heritage restrictions. Lohta Station (Figure 6), on the outskirts, also offers large tracts of land that could easily host expanded railway facilities. Both sites would have allowed the government to modernise railway infrastructure without bulldozing the archaeological nucleus of Kashi.



Figure 5



Figure 6

## Ignored Alternatives and Political Choice

Despite these options, the authorities chose Rajghat. This decision cannot be explained in terms of necessity but rather in terms of political optics. Building a “modern station” in the heart of sacred Kashi carries symbolic value for political leaders eager to showcase development. Unfortunately, this symbolism has come at the cost of irreparable heritage loss.

## The Namo Ghat Precedent

This is not the first time Varanasi’s heritage has suffered for urban projects. The construction of Namo Ghat, a riverfront beautification project, led to the destruction of archaeological deposits linked to the early historic phase of Kashi. Scholars from BHU had raised similar concerns then, but the project went ahead regardless. The Rajghat case shows a continuing pattern: heritage is repeatedly sacrificed to make way for politically driven infrastructure projects.



Fig. 7: Satellite Image of Shivpur Railway Station



Fig. 8: Satellite Image of Lohta Railway Station

Alternative railway stations at Shivpur and Lohta. Both alternatives have sufficient land but were ignored, leading to the destruction of Rajghat.

## Legal Breach: AMASR Act and Lal Khan's Tomb

At Rajghat stands the Tomb of Lal Khan, a 18th-century Mughal monument. It is a centrally protected monument under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958. By law, the land surrounding this monument falls under strict protection zones.

According to the Act, A 100-metre radius around the monument is a prohibited zone where no construction or excavation is permitted. The next 200 metres is a regulated zone, where construction can only be carried out with permission from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)/NMA. (THE ANCIENT MONUMENTS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES AND REMAINS ACT, 1958) Despite these clear legal safeguards, the Kashi IMS Project was permitted to proceed without obtaining the mandatory No Objection Certificate (NOC). Heritage observers and scholars allege that the approval was facilitated through a State Government–appointed committee, comprising professors from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and IIT (BHU), who reportedly succumbed to political pressure, thereby overriding both the letter and spirit of the law.

Such actions not only undermine the statutory authority of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) but also weaken India's credibility as a signatory to international heritage frameworks, including the UNESCO 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which mandates the preservation of cultural sites of outstanding universal value.

## AMASR Provisions in Context

**Table 3: Key Provisions of the AMASR Act (1958) and Their Violation at Rajghat**

<i>Legal Provision (AMASR Act, 1958)</i>	<i>Requirement</i>	<i>Situation at Rajghat</i>	<i>Status</i>
Section 20A – Prohibited Area (100m radius)	No construction or excavation allowed within 100m of a protected monument	IMS project construction directly overlaps with Lal Khan's Tomb zone	Violated
Section 20B – Regulated Area (200m radius)	Construction permitted only with ASI/NMA approval and conditions	No NOC	Illegal
Section 19 – Preservation of Monuments	Duty of government to protect and maintain monuments of national importance	Bulldozing has damaged heritage context of the Tomb and surrounding mound	Neglected
International Commitment (UNESCO 1972)	Member states must safeguard heritage of outstanding universal value	Heritage loss at Rajghat contradicts India's obligations	Violated

ASI's RTI response confirms that no NOC was issued for construction within the regulated or prohibited zones of Lal Khan Tomb or the broader Rajghat mound. The site plan provided by ASI further shows that the current construction overlaps both prohibited and regulated areas, including the Namoo Ghat, making these activities illegal under Sections 20A and 20B of the AMASR Act, 1958. The violation of statutory safeguards demonstrates a failure of governance and highlights the urgent need for enforcement of heritage protection laws.

**Proposed site for IMS**



**This is the Proposed Site for IMS Source: DPR, Kashi IMS**

File No. 11/42/RTI/Adm-2017-1479  
 Government of India  
 Archaeological Survey of India  
 Sarnath Circle  
 Sarnath, Varanasi

**08 OCT 2025**  
 Date:-

To,  
 Ankesh Kumar Maurya,  
 Near Panchayat Bhawan, Susuwahi, Varanasi, Pin:221005

**Sub: Information sought under R.T.I. Act, 2005-reg.**  
 Sir,

With reference to your online RTI registration No. **ALSOI/R/E/25/00920** dated **11.09.2025** in which you have sought information under RTI Act, 2005. Point-wise information in respect of Archaeological Survey of India, Sarnath Circle, Sarnath is as under:

Sl. No.	Question	Answer
01.	Please provide certified copies of all No Objection Certificates NOCs permissions or clearances issued by the Archaeological Survey of India ASI to the authorities builders or agencies involved in the Inter Modal Kashi Railway Station Project near Rajghat Ancient Remains and Lal Khan Tomb.	No objection certificates (NOCs) are not issued by this office.
02.	lease provide details of the date of application file number and reference number under which such NOCs permissions were granted along with the names of the applicant authorities Indian Railways Ministry of Railways contractors or builders.	
03.	Please provide the exact demarcation maps drawings of the prohibited area 100 meters and regulated area 200 meters around Rajghat Ancient Remains and Lal Khan Tomb as per the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains AMASR Act 1958 and its 2010 Amendment and indicate whether the proposed construction site falls within these zones.	Map attached.
04.	Please provide copies of inspection reports Heritage Impact Assessments or Archaeological Impact Assessments conducted before granting permission for the Inter Modal Kashi Railway Station Project.	No information available in this office.
05.	Please provide copies of minutes of meetings objections or recommendations made by ASI heritage experts or any committee regarding this project and the manner in which ASI considered or resolved those objections..	No such information is available in this office record.
06.	Please provide the name designation and office of the competent authority who approved and signed the NOCs or permission for the Inter Modal Kashi Railway Station Project near Rajghat.	NOCs are not issued by this office.

**Figure 9: RTI reply received by the author from the ASI, Sarnath Circle, confirming that no No Objection Certificate (NOC) was issued for the Kashi Intermodal Station (IMS) Project.**



**Fig. 10.** Heritage sensitivity zones around Lal Khan's Tomb at Rajghat under the AMASR Act. The IMS construction overlaps with both prohibited and regulated areas, showing a direct legal violation.

### Development vs Archaeology

The Kashi Intermodal Station (IMS) project epitomises the tension between development and archaeology in contemporary India. On the one hand, it is presented as a modernising initiative that will improve transport connectivity, enhance passenger facilities, and symbolise Varanasi's transformation into a global smart city. On the other hand, its construction has resulted in the destruction of archaeological layers at Rajghat, a site that embodies more than two millennia of continuous settlement and cultural evolution. Bulldozers and heavy machinery have reduced stratified deposits into rubble, erasing contextual information that archaeologists rely upon to reconstruct Kashi's past. This conflict highlights a recurring dilemma in urban India: while development is necessary for economic growth and public utility, when pursued without sensitivity to heritage, it risks obliterating the very cultural assets that give cities their identity. The Rajghat crisis therefore demands a rethinking of planning frameworks, where infrastructure expansion should proceed only after mandatory heritage impact assessments, expert consultations, and the exploration of alternative sites. Only by integrating archaeology into development can India achieve progress without erasing its past.

### Impact on Archaeology & Cultural Heritage

The redevelopment of Kashi Railway Station has had a severe impact on Rajghat, one of the most historically significant sites in Varanasi. Archaeological evidence suggests that Rajghat was part of the ancient urban core of Kashi, with excavations revealing fortification walls, pottery, terracotta artifacts, and structural remnants dating back to the 8th century BCE. These findings point to continuous settlement and urbanization during the Kashi Mahajanapada period.

Despite this, the construction of the intermodal station has destroyed or buried large sections of the site. Ancient layers that could have provided insight into urban planning, trade, and culture

of early Kashi have been removed or covered. In addition, the Tomb of Lal Khan, a centrally protected monument, stands within the redevelopment zone. Its surroundings have been disrupted, violating provisions of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958.

The cultural impact extends beyond physical destruction. Rajghat held significance not only as an archaeological site but also as a marker of the city's early civilization, connecting present-day Varanasi to its ancient past. Scholars from BHU's Department of Ancient Indian History & Archaeology have repeatedly warned that such destruction erodes the tangible link to Kashi Mahajanapada, making future research and heritage conservation nearly impossible.

Furthermore, alternative sites like Shivpur and Lohta, which have ample space and lower heritage sensitivity, were overlooked, suggesting that political pressure rather than urban planning necessity drove the decision. This raises concerns about heritage governance and accountability, as the loss at Rajghat is irreversible.

In summary, the redevelopment has not only destroyed physical archaeological layers but has also disrupted the historical narrative of Varanasi, severing a crucial connection to its early urban civilization.

### Legal & Policy Violations

The Rajghat destruction during the Kashi Station redevelopment project raises serious legal concerns. Under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act, 1958, any area within 100 meters of a protected monument is declared a prohibited zone, where construction or public works require strict permissions. The Tomb of Lal Khan, located within this zone, is a centrally protected monument. Despite this, construction proceeded, suggesting that regulatory norms were ignored or bypassed.

Typically, projects in such sensitive zones require:

1. No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)/NMA.
2. Environmental clearance, if there is any ecological impact.
3. Adherence to heritage conservation guidelines, including proper excavation and documentation.

In the case of Rajghat:

- NO NOCs appear to have been granted by NMA/ASI, sidelining ASI recommendations.
- No systematic archaeological survey was carried out before construction, leading to irreversible loss of historical layers.
- Surrounding heritage sites, including remnants of the Kashi Mahajanapada, were not considered in planning, which violates principles of heritage protection in urban development.

This situation highlights the gap between legislation and enforcement, where heritage laws exist but are compromised for political or commercial purposes. Scholars argue that failure to protect Rajghat sets a dangerous precedent, potentially encouraging similar disregard for heritage in other historically sensitive areas.

In essence, the redevelopment of Rajghat represents not only a physical destruction of archaeology but also a legal failure, undermining India's commitment to preserving its cultural heritage.

## Global Lessons in Heritage and Development

Modern cities with ancient pasts face a common dilemma: how to build infrastructure without erasing evidence of early civilisation. The following examples from Rome, Athens (and Greece more broadly), and Istanbul offer important lessons for Rajghat.

### Rome (Italy)

- **Metro C's Excavations and Archaeological Stations:** In central Rome, construction of the Metro C extension (which will connect areas such as Piazza Venezia, the Colosseum, and Vatican) has uncovered numerous archaeological remains, working-class Roman homes, frescoed walls, mosaic floors, and artifacts dating from the late Roman Republic to Imperial periods.
- **“Archaeological Station” Concept:** At the Amba Aradam station, for example, the plan is to integrate such findings directly into the station design, preserving them in situ or reassembling certain segments (mosaics, structural components) so that commuters see them as part of the station's fabric.
- **Jubilee-Related Urban Redevelopment:** Ahead of major events (such as the Catholic Holy Year of Jubilee 2025), Rome has also modernised infrastructure while renovating preservation zones around heritage landmarks. A project like Piazza dei Cinquecento (front of Termini station) involved careful investment (~€45 million) to improve transport access and pedestrian zones without destroying heritage.

Rome shows that it is possible to **delay or adapt construction** to accommodate heritage, to design transit nodes as “living museums,” and to allocate resources for preserving archaeological layers along with transport and pedestrian infrastructure. Planning tends to include archaeologists from early stages, and designs are often modified when significant finds emerge.

### Athens and Greece

- **Athens Metro System & Antiquities in Stations:** When Athens built its metro (especially before and around the 2004 Olympics), more than 50,000 archaeological finds were unearthed during tunneling and station construction. Many of these are displayed in stations such as Syntagma, Monastiraki, Evangelismos, Panepistimio, Egaleo, etc. These exhibits include stratigraphic displays, burial remains, parts of the ancient water supply and sewerage systems, pottery, mosaics, and tombs.
- **Thessaloniki Metro:** The recently opened metro line in Thessaloniki (first line ~9.6 km, 13 stations) faced massive archaeological discoveries during its protracted construction (since ~2003). The city opted to preserve many finds in situ and integrate them into station design. Over 300,000 artefacts were recovered, including Roman-era roads, burial sites, mosaics, etc., many displayed in stations (e.g., Venizelou Station).

Athens & Thessaloniki illustrate that infrastructure and heritage need not be mutually exclusive. Authorities there commit to: **Excavations in parallel** with construction, so that heritage is documented before destruction.

- **Public displays** of archaeological finds within transit stations (or nearby), making heritage visible and part of daily city life.

- **Adjustments to engineering** (depth of tunnels, station design) to avoid or preserve important layers.
- **Legal and bureaucratic frameworks** that enforce the protection and oversight of archaeological work.

City/ Site	Project / Context	Archaeological Discoveries	Approach to Preservation	Lessons for Rajghat
<b>Rome (Italy)</b>	Metro C expansion, Piazza dei Cinquecento redevelopment	Working-class Roman houses, frescoes, mosaics, ancient roads	Integrated “archaeological stations”; in-situ displays inside metro stations; redesign of construction when major finds emerge	Infrastructure can <b>coexist with heritage</b> if excavation and redesign are built into planning
<b>Athens (Greece)</b>	Athens Metro (esp. 2004 Olympics), Thessaloniki Metro	>50,000 finds: tombs, aqueducts, mosaics, pottery, roads	Exhibits in stations (Syntagma, Monastiraki, Venizelou); parallel excavation with construction; engineering adjustments	Turn transit stations into “ <b>living museums</b> ”; ensure public visibility of heritage
<b>Rajghat (India)</b>	Kashi Inter Model Station Project (ongoing)	Archaeological mounds, artefacts of Kashi Mahajanapada, Lal Khan Tomb (protected)	Large-scale demolition, bulldozing of ancient layers, limited survey, heritage largely ignored	Shows <b>lack of integration</b> of archaeology in planning; need to adopt global best practices

## Alternative Planning & Recommendations

The destruction at Rajghat could have been avoided with careful planning and consideration of heritage-sensitive areas. Several alternative strategies could have preserved both the needs of urban infrastructure and the historical integrity of Varanasi.

1. **Use of Alternative Sites:** Varanasi district has areas like Shivpur, Lohta, and other outskirts, which offer ample land for railway expansion without impacting archaeologically sensitive zones. These areas are largely devoid of ancient settlements, making them suitable for large-scale infrastructure projects.
2. **Heritage Impact Assessment:** Before any construction in historically sensitive zones, a comprehensive Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) should be mandatory. This would identify archaeological layers, protected monuments, and cultural significance, guiding planners to avoid destruction.
3. **Integration of Heritage in Urban Planning:** Modern infrastructure can be designed around heritage sites, rather than on top of them. Examples from cities like Jaipur and Hampi show that stations, roads, and terminals can coexist with protected monuments through buffer zones and minimal intervention strategies.
4. **Public Participation and Expert Consultation:** Decisions affecting heritage should involve archaeologists, historians, local communities, and heritage NGOs. This ensures transparent decision-making and reduces the risk of politically motivated destruction.
5. **Strict Enforcement of Laws:** Authorities must ensure AMASR Act compliance, including proper ASI approvals and monitoring construction in prohibited areas. Violations should trigger penalties and legal accountability to prevent similar cases in the future.

## Recommendation Summary

- Relocate major infrastructure to less sensitive sites.
- Conduct detailed archaeological and environmental assessments.
- Integrate heritage preservation into project design.
- Engage experts and local stakeholders.
- Enforce existing heritage protection laws rigorously.

By adopting these measures, Varanasi could have modernized its railway infrastructure while preserving its ancient urban heritage, maintaining the city's unique historical identity.

## Conclusion

The redevelopment of Kashi Railway Station at Rajghat has caused a profound and irreversible loss to Varanasi's archaeological and cultural heritage, destroying key remnants of the ancient Kashi Mahajanapada, including fortifications, pottery, structural layers, and other artifacts dating back to the 8th century BCE, while also disrupting the centrally protected Tomb of Lal Khan, thereby violating the AMASR Act and undermining established heritage protection laws; this destruction highlights serious failures in urban planning, including the disregard for heritage-sensitive zones, lack of proper archaeological and environmental assessments, and insufficient consultation with historians, archaeologists, and local communities, while alternative sites such as Shivpur and Lohta, which offered ample land without endangering historical sites, were overlooked, suggesting political and commercial priorities took precedence over conservation; the Rajghat case underscores the urgent need for heritage-conscious development policies that balance infrastructure growth with preservation of historical identity, enforce strict compliance with legal frameworks, integrate expert and public participation in planning, and recognize that the loss of such irreplaceable archaeological layers not only erases physical traces of the past but severs the city's connection to its ancient civilization, cultural memory, and collective historical consciousness, emphasizing that future urban projects must prioritize safeguarding India's rich cultural and historical legacy alongside modernization.

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