

# ASI finds Buddhist caves, temples in tiger reserve

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#### What's in News?

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) reported **26 Buddhist caves in Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve.** 

#### **News Highlights:**

- The exploration was conducted by the ASI's newly formed Jabalpur Circle.
- The team covered nearly 170 sq km within the reserve's core area.
- 26 Buddhist caves, which date back to the 2nd-5th century BCE, other archaeological remains of the Mahayana sect of Buddhism, such as chaitya-shaped doors and cells containing stone beds, were found.
- The explorations in the region had been undertaken for the first time since 1938

#### **Baghelkhand:**

- This excavations added a new chapter in the history of Baghelkhand
- Baghelkhand, which is said to derive its name from the Vaghela Rajput kings of the 14th century, covers the northeastern regions of Madhya Pradesh, and a small area of southeastern Uttar Pradesh.

#### The Findings:

- The 26 caves that were found are associated with the **Mahayana sect of Buddhism**, adding that these date back to the same time as the Ajanta caves in Aurangabad, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.
- This discovery brings the total number of caves found in Bandhavgarh to 76, as 50 are already in the records since the last survey.
- Besides the caves, the team also found the remains of 26 temples, two mathas, two stupas, 46 idols and sculptures, 26 fragments and 19 water bodies.
- It also mentioned a Buddhist pillar fragment containing a miniature stupa carving, dating to the 2nd-3rd century CE, and 24 Brahmi inscriptions from the 2nd-5th century CE.
- A Votive Stupa (small stupas held the ashes of the monastic dead) has also been reported for the first time.
- The temples are from more recent times the **Kalachuri period** (9th-11th century), while the water bodies range between 2nd-15th centuries CE.
- In addition to this, two Saiva mutts have also been documented.
- The Kalachuri dynasty, which spread over parts of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, is also associated with the earliest Ellora and Elephanta cave monuments.
- Some remains of the Gupta period, such as door jambs and carvings in caves, have also been found.
- Many ancient sculptures, including large monolithic sculptures of various avatars of Vishnlike 'Varaha' and 'Matsya', and "board games made in natural caves" were found
- The report says that the places Kaushami, Mathura, Pavata (Parvata), Vejabharada and Sapatanaairikaa are mentioned in the Brahmini inscriptions, while the inscribed names of kings include Shri Bhimsena, Maharaja Pothasiri and Bhattadeva.
- Coins belonging to Mughal-era and Sharqi dynasty of Jaunpur Sultanate have also been found

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### **Significance:**

- The place where excavation is done, was ruled by HindKings, while the discovery of Buddhist remains shows the **religious harmony in the region**.
- Further, the names of old cities like Mathura and Kaushambi, located in Uttar Pradesh, puts light on **trade** and other ties between the people in the region.
- Mathura's name was mentioned in Brahmi script, in addition to inscriptions in Nagari and Shankhalipi.

#### **Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve:**

- Bandhavgarh Tiger Reserve in **Madhya Pradesh** is home to magnificent big cats.
- Bandhavgarh was declared a national park in 1968 and became a tiger reserve in 1993.
- It is located in the eastern **Satpura hill range** of Umaria and Katni districts.
- Mythologically the name "Bandhavgarh" means Bandhav or brother and garh meaning fort.
- Its mention can be found in the ancient books of the 'Narad Pancharatra' and the 'Shiv Purana' that this place is being associated with Ramayana.
- The Tiger Reserve is known for the healthy population of tigers and variety of herbivores.
- This area is unique from the point of biodiversity, as it comprises hills, valley, rivers, marshes and meadows to give rise to diverse vegetation.
- Apart from tiger, as many as 34 species of mammals have been listed and nearly 260 species of birds and 70 species of butterfly.