



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 Vishnu like '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

Significance:

- The place where excavation is done, was ruled by Hindu Kings, 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.