Lankamala Shaivite Centre (16th century) in Andhra Pradesh

Why in News?

A team of researchers at the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Mysore, has uncovered ancient inscriptions and prehistoric rock art in Andhra Pradesh.

- **Pilgrimage Centre -** The findings, dating from the 4th to 16th century Common Era (CE), indicate that Lankamala was a major Shaivite pilgrimage centre visited by North Indian devotees.
- The presence of North Indian names like Sri Vishishta Kankanadhadi, Yedharmaja, and Chandrahasa confirms that pilgrims travelled long distances to visit the temples of Lankamala.
- Researchers also traced an *ancient pilgrimage route* between two Shaivite temples, reinforcing the site's religious significance.
- It discovered rock inscriptions and carvings in the Siddavatam, Madduru, Konduru, and Rolabodu forest areas.
- **Inscriptions -** In Gopalaswami Konda, at an altitude of 3,200 feet, they documented 12 label inscriptions written in ***Siddhamatrika, Shankha script, and Devanagari.***
    - The inscriptions, believed to be from the 6th century CE, showcase ***Kushan-era craftsmanship*** and were carved using a unique *thumb-engraving technique.*
- The team identified 15 additional label inscriptions, including 14 in the rare Shankha script and one in Brahmi.
- This marks the 1st discovery of Shankha script inscriptions in the Rayalaseema region.
- A significant find was *2 inscriptions on the same rock from different periods*,
    - One in Brahmi from the 4th century and
    - Another in Shankha script from the 6th century, providing insights into the evolution of writing styles in South India.
- They persevered and identified a total of 28 inscriptions, confirming human presence in the region from the 4th to 16th centuries.
- It is the first time in 140 years that label inscriptions have been discovered inside a wildlife sanctuary.
- **Rock Shelters -** The team uncovered 3 rock shelters, one containing prehistoric rock paintings.
- The artwork, depicting animals, geometric patterns, and human figures, was created using ***Red Ochre, Kaolin, animal fat, and crushed bones***, enabling the pigments to last for millennia.
- The site is believed to date back to the Megalithic (Iron Age) and Early Historic periods (2500 BCE - 2nd century CE).

Reference

[New Indian Express | Shaivite centre in Lankamala]