Prelim Bits 18-01-2024 | UPSC Daily Current Affairs

Adi Shankaracharya & Advaita

All 4 shankaracharyas will not attend Ram temple inauguration in 2024.

- **Birth** – *Kalady* village on the bank of the *River Periyar* in Kerala.
- **Period** – Between 788 and 820 AD.
- **Guru** – ***Govinda Bhagavatpada***.
- **Works** – Visiting spiritual centres, challenging prevalent philosophical traditions, and *establishing mathas, organising monastic orders* and a *proponent of Advaita Vedanta*.
- **Spiritual visits** – From Kanchi in Tamil Nadu to Kamrup in Assam, from Kashmir, Kedar & Badri dhams in the Himalayas to Kashi on the bank of the Ganga and Puri on the Bay of Bengal.
- **Contributions** – He is also popularly identified as the *author of 116 works*, including celebrated *commentaries (or bhashyas)* on 10 ***Upanishads***, the ***Brahmasutra***, and the ***Bhagavad Gita***.
- **Shankara's legacy** – His mathas are seen as *keepers of Hindu faith and traditions* and imagined of *Hindu India* transcending the political boundaries of his time.

Shankaracharyas
• They are *religious teachers* who belong to a line of teachers going back all the way to Adi Shankara himself. • **Meaning** – *Teacher of the way of Shankara*. • A religious title *used by the heads of the 4 cardinal maths* believed to have been established by Adi Shankara (c 788 CE-820 CE). • **Mathas** – Dwarka (Gujarat), Joshimath (Uttarakhand), Puri (Odisha), and Sringeri (Karnataka) • They comprise *religious shrines and temples, as well as libraries and residences*. • There is little historical evidence for the existence of these *mathas* prior to the 14th century CE, when the Vijayanagara kingdom began to patronise the Sringeri *matha*.

Advaita Vedanta

- A school of Hindu philosophy and spiritual discipline.
- **Proponent** – Adi Shankara
- **Principles** – ***Radical nondualism***, it posits that all that we perceive is ultimately illusory (maya), and that the principle of ***brahman is the only true reality*** of all things, transcending empirical plurality.
- **Fundamental thrust** – It lies in the ***unity of atman or individual consciousness, and brahman or the ultimate reality***.
- **Spread** – Through systematised theories of *metaphysics, language, and epistemology*.

Reference

The Indian Express| Adi Shankaracharya

Prior Approval to probe Public Officials

Recently, Supreme Court delivered a split verdict regarding the requirement to seek 'previous approval' before conducting an inquiry into the allegations against the public official of the State.

- **Section 6A of DSPE Act 1946 –** Delhi Special Police Establishment (Amendment) Act of 2003 introduced a *prior approval provision*.
- Government agencies like the ***CBI were required to seek approval from the central government*** before investigating alleged offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act ***(PCA), 1988,*** if the employee in question held a rank higher than joint secretary.
- The Supreme Court *struck down this requirement in 2014*.
- **Section 17A of PCA** – 2018 amendment act of PCA states that, if a public servant commits an offence under the Act while discharging their official duties, investigators ***must receive approval from the central/ state government, or a competent authority*** to open an inquiry or investigation.
- **Challenges** – In 2018, the *NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) challenged its constitutionality* as no investigation could be conducted in the 1st place.
- Placing this burden on police officers and investigating agencies *would protect corrupt officials*, and the levels of corruption would rise.
- **Current case** – One of the Justice held that prior approval was necessary before the inquiry while other Justice held it was necessary to seek *approval only to investigate offences committed after 2018*, the year when requirement was introduced.

> ***In CBI v R R Kishore 2023****, the Constitution Bench held that officials cannot claim immunity under Section 6A, even if the offence was committed before this provision was struck down.*

Reference

The Indian Express| The Basis of Prior Approval

Snow Leopard

The Padmaja Naidu Himalayan Zoological Park (PNHZP), also known as Darjeeling zoo was successful in breeding 77 snow leopards since the 1980s.

> *Darjeeling Zoo is the world's 2nd largest Snow Leopard breeding program next to New York's Bronx Zoo.*

- **Scientific Name** – Panthera uncia
- They are referred as ***the 'ghost of the mountains'*** for their camouflaging ability.
- **Nativity** – The alpine regions of Central Asia.
- **Habitat** – Rugged mountainous areas or non-forested areas covering an ***altitude between 3200m-5200m***.
- **Growing conditions** – They have thick ***white-gray coat spotted with large black rosettes*** which helps them blend with Asia's steep and rocky, high mountains and helps them to survive harsh cold climates.
- During the winter months, they are likely to descend to lower elevations.
- **In India** – Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, which contributes to *about 5% of the global snow leopard range*.

Conservation of Snow Leopard

- **Protection Status**
  - IUCN status is ***Vulnerable***
  - ***Appendix I*** of Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES).
  - ***Schedule I*** of Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972.
- **Project Snow Leopard** – India's centrally-supported program to ***conserve the species and habitats***.
- **SECURE Himalaya** – It is funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- GSLEP – Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme is an ***alliance of 12 snow leopard range countries***, multi-lateral institutions, NGOs, scientists and local communities to conserve them.

References

1. The Indian Express| Snow Leopard Breeding in Darjeeling Zoo
2. The Indian Express| Snow Leopard Conservation

Soligas & Yeravas

A recent book has looked into the diets of Soligas and Yeravas communities, who have been living in the Cauvery Basin and the surrounding hills of peninsular India for thousands of years.

> *The book Forgotten Trails: Foraging Wild Edibles was authored by Malemleima Ningombi and Harisha RP.*

- **Soligas** – They are an ***indigenous tribe of Biligiri Rangan Hills (B.R. Hills) in Karnataka*** who have been dependent on the forests for their livelihood traditionally.
- They are also called as ***Children of bamboo***.

Recognition of Soligas
• They are considered the ***1st settlers of India***. • Their home, BR Hills, was among the 1st areas to be declared a ***wildlife sanctuary in India, in 1974***. • They were the ***1st community to win resident rights in a tiger reserve*** when the region got the status in 2011. • ***New genus of wasp was named after them*** in recognition of their conservation of forests and biodiversity. • Under Indian law, they are ***recognized as a scheduled tribe***.

- **Food** – Honey is an important part of their diet.
- **Language** – ***Sholaga***, which belongs to the Dravidian family.
- **Occupation** – ***Shifting cultivation*** and their main source of income is harvesting and sale of Non-timber Forest Produce (NTFP).
- **Culture** – They follow ***naturism and animism*** along with following Hindu practices and their main deities are Madeshwara.

Yeravas

- They came to Karnataka *from Wayanad district in Kerala* and settled in Kodagu district of the state whose ***settlements are called 'Kunju'***.
- **Language** – Revula language.
- **Occupation** – Most of them are ***agricultural workers*** in coffee plantations and tea estates.
- **Culture** – There are many customs and rituals practiced among the Adiyas who ***believe in witchcraft***.
- They perform a ritual dance to cure disease, ward off miseries and evil eye, and safe delivery of child.
- **Food** – They use *more tubers than Soligas*.
- *Mushrooms* are part of their diet during monsoons while in winters, they depend on the *wild berries and edible ferns*.

The Western Ghats are one of the world's biodiversity hotspots, with over 5,000 flowering plants, 139 mammals, 508 birds and 179 amphibian species.

Reference

Down To Earth| Diet among Soligas and Yeravas

SHANKAR IAS PARLIAMENT
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