Ratnagiri Buddhist Site

Why in News?

Archaeological Survey of India have recently unearthed a colossal Buddha head, a massive palm, an ancient wall and inscribed Buddhist relics, all of which are estimated to date back 8th and 9th Century AD.

- **Location -** The Ratnagiri Buddhist site, located in the Ratnagiri,Jajpur district of ***Odisha.***
- **Period** - It is an archaeological site that dates back to the 4^{th}-6^{th} centuries CE.
- It is part of the famous ***Diamond Triangle*** of Odisha along with Udaygiri and Lalitgiri, Ratnagiri, translated as the 'Hills of Jewels' was first documented as a historical site in 1905.
- **Rivers** - The site stands on a hill between Birupa and Brahmani rivers.
- **Features** - It features ancient rock-cut caves, stupas, and monastic complexes, showcasing the Buddhist monasticism and art.
- **Origin of sects** - Mahayana and Tantrayana (also known as Vajrayana that involves mystical practices and concepts) sects of Buddhism originated.
- **Associated Travelers -** Chinese Buddhist monk and traveller, ***Hiuen Tsang***, who visited Odisha, during 638-639 AD, might have visited Ratnagiri.
- The new excavations would shed light about the lifestyle, culture, religion, art and architecture at different times.

The links of Buddhism in Ratnagiri and Southeast Asia

- Odisha has long enjoyed maritime and trade links with Southeast Asian countries.
- **Items of Trade -** Pepper, cinnamon, cardamom, silk, camphor, gold, and jewellery were popular items of trade between the ancient kingdom of Kalinga and Southeast Asia.
- **Baliyatra** - The state also annually holds Baliyatra, literally 'voyage to Bali'.
- It is a 7-day festival to commemorate the maritime and cultural links between Kalinga and Bali and Southeast Asian regions such as Java, Sumatra, Borneo, Burma (Myanmar) and Ceylon (Sri Lanka).
- Experts believe that ***Tapassu and Bhallika,*** the two merchant brothers who became the first disciples of Lord Buddha, having their origins from Utkala, another ancient name of Odisha.
- **Mauryan Emperor Ashoka** (304-232 BCE), whose invasion of the kingdom of Kalinga in 261, the ancient name for Odisha led to him embracing the religion.
- Buddhism is stated to have particularly flourished under the ***Bhaumakara dynasty***, which ruled parts of the state in between the 8^{th} and 10^{th} Century.

Reference

[The Indian Express | ASI excavation in Ratnagiri]