

## Zehanpora archaeological site

**Prelims:** Current events of national and international importance | History

### Why in News?

The ongoing excavation at Zehanpora put the spotlight on the significance of Kashmir in Buddhist history.

- It is a **Buddhist site** dating back nearly 2,000 years to the **Kushan period**.
- **Located in** - Baramulla district of Jammu and Kashmir.
- **Structures found** - Stupas, monk living spaces, and carefully planned stone foundations.
- **Possible Links** - Archaeologists believe Zehanpora may have had links with **Huvishkapura**, an ancient Kushan capital often mentioned in historical texts.
- **Architecture** - The stupa layouts show **Gandharan influence**, indicating cultural exchange with north-western Buddhist regions.
- **Strategic Location** - Zehanpora, situated on an **ancient trade and pilgrimage corridor** linking Gandhara and Kashmir, enabled the movement of monks, merchants, and religious ideas.
- **Cultural Importance** - It shows Kashmir's role as a major Buddhist centre and a hub in ancient trade and pilgrimage networks.

### Other Significance of Jammu & Kashmir

- **Historical Significance** - Emperor Ashoka, who is believed to have founded the **city of Srinagar**, established monasteries and stupas in the region.
- **Geographical Significance** - Kashmir's position between the Indus-Gandhara region and the Himalayas made it a natural link between India and Asia.
- **Learning Centre** - Early Buddhist and Sanskrit texts describe Kashmir as **Sharada Pitha**, a major centre of learning in ancient and medieval times.
- **4<sup>th</sup> Buddhist Council** - King Kanishka convened a Buddhist council in Kashmir, led by Vasumitra and attended by Ashvaghosha.
- This council played a key role in organising and spreading Mahayana Buddhism.
- **Philosophical significance** - Nagarjuna's **Madhyamaka philosophy** peaked in Kashmir, making it a **hub of Mahayana Buddhist thought**.
- **Global outreach** - Kashmir spread Mahayana ideas westward to Qandhar, Kabul, and Bactria and preserved Buddhist knowledge through the **Gilgit Manuscripts** (among the oldest Buddhist texts).
- Kashmir was a key launchpad for global Buddhism, not a peripheral region.

## References

1. [Indian Express | Zehanpora excavation](#)
2. [Times of India | Zehanpora excavation](#)

