



ODISHA: A BASTION OF ANCIENT CULTURAL RELICS: ANCIENT HISTORY: GS-I



Odisha, a state on India's eastern coast, is a treasure trove of history, culture, and spirituality. With its strategic location and ancient maritime connections, Odisha has been a hub of cultural exchange, trade, and learning for centuries. Among its rich heritage, the "Diamond Triangle" of Ratnagiri, Udaygiri, and Lalitgiri stands as a testament to its profound connection with Buddhism.

The Diamond Triangle of Odisha

The Diamond Triangle comprises three significant Buddhist sites: Ratnagiri, Udaygiri, and Lalitgiri. These sites are situated in Jajpur district, about 100 kilometers from Odisha's capital, Bhubaneswar. Their historical and spiritual significance has attracted scholars, archaeologists, and devotees for centuries.

The name "Diamond Triangle" aptly reflects the richness of these sites in terms of their historical and cultural treasures. They collectively represent Odisha's role as a major center of Buddhist learning and influence from the 5th to the 13th century. Each site holds unique architectural marvels, inscriptions, and relics that narrate the tale of Odisha's flourishing Buddhist era.

Lalitgiri, the oldest of the three, is believed to date back to the 2nd century BCE. It houses stupas, monasteries, and even relic caskets that hint at its spiritual importance. Udaygiri, another gem of the triangle, features monasteries and stupas surrounded by lush greenery. Ratnagiri, however, stands out as the most significant of the three due to its rich collection of sculptures,



stupas, and its reputation as a key Buddhist learning center.

Odisha and Buddhism: Spiritual and Cultural Relations

Odisha's relationship with Buddhism traces back to the 3rd century BCE during the reign of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka. The bloodshed of the Kalinga War profoundly impacted Ashoka, leading him to embrace Buddhism. Ashoka not only adopted the principles of peace and nonviolence but also propagated the religion across his vast empire and beyond, extending its reach to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia.

Buddhism flourished in Odisha under the Bhaumakara dynasty (8th–10th century CE). The rulers of this era were devout patrons of Buddhism, encouraging the construction of monasteries, stupas, and sculptures. Odisha became a vibrant center for the Mahayana and Vajrayana sects of Buddhism, contributing significantly to Buddhist art, architecture, and philosophy.

Odisha's maritime connections further cemented its role in spreading Buddhism to Southeast Asia. Ancient Kalinga had trade links with Bali, Java, Sumatra, and Sri Lanka. These interactions were not limited to commerce but included cultural and religious exchanges. Festivals like the Baliyatra, held annually to commemorate this ancient maritime heritage, are a living reminder of Odisha's ties to Southeast Asia.

Ratnagiri: The Jewel of Odisha's Buddhist Heritage

Ratnagiri, meaning "Hills of Jewels," is the most famous site in Odisha's Diamond Triangle. Nestled between the rivers Birupa and Brahmani, this site thrived as a center of Buddhist learning and spirituality between the 5th and 13th centuries. Its peak period of activity is dated between the 7th and 10th centuries, during which it rivaled even Nalanda in prominence.

The site was first documented in 1905 and underwent major excavations between 1958 and 1961 under archaeologist Debala Mitra. These efforts unearthed a wealth of artifacts, including a brick stupa, three monastic complexes, and numerous votive stupas. However, much of the site remained unexplored until the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) resumed excavations in December 2023, led by superintending archaeologist D.B. Garnayak.

The latest discoveries at Ratnagiri include a colossal Buddha head measuring 3-4 feet in height, a massive 5-foot palm, an ancient wall, and inscribed Buddhist relics. These artifacts are estimated to date back to the 8th and 9th centuries. According to Buddhist researcher Sunil Patnaik, these findings underscore the richness of the site and its historical significance.

The discoveries also point to Ratnagiri's role as a vibrant center of Buddhist art and culture. The colossal Buddha head and palm suggest the existence of monumental sculptures that likely adorned the site's prayer halls and stupas. Additionally, the unearthed relics could provide insights into the cultural framework and material culture of the region, including its connections



with Southeast Asia.

Significance of the Discoveries

The renewed focus on Ratnagiri is a significant step in understanding Odisha's Buddhist heritage. Archaeologists aim to uncover not only the remaining structures and sculptures but also evidence of a chaitya (prayer hall) complex and ceramic assemblages. These findings will help piece together the lifestyle, art, and architecture of the era.

Experts also hope to establish stronger links between Ratnagiri and Southeast Asia. Odisha's maritime history and trade relations with regions like Bali, Java, and Sri Lanka are well-documented, but material evidence from sites like Ratnagiri could shed new light on these connections. The excavation also aims to explore the potential influence of Southeast Asian culture on the region's art and architecture.

Scholars believe that Ratnagiri's role as a learning center was unparalleled, with Tibetan texts hinting at its significance in the development of Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism. The new findings may provide further evidence of the site's importance in spreading Buddhist teachings and practices across Asia.

Conclusion

Odisha stands as a bastion of ancient cultural relics, with its Diamond Triangle serving as a shining example of its historical and spiritual legacy. The recent discoveries at Ratnagiri reaffirm the state's significance as a center of Buddhist learning and culture. They also highlight its role in fostering connections between India and Southeast Asia, both through maritime trade and religious exchanges.

As excavations continue, the findings promise to enrich our understanding of Odisha's past, offering glimpses into its art, architecture, and cultural framework. Ratnagiri, with its monumental sculptures and relics, serves as a reminder of the state's rich heritage and its enduring influence on the broader Buddhist world. Through continued research and preservation, Odisha's historical treasures will continue to inspire and educate future generations.

Main Practice Question

Descriptive Question:

Discuss the significance of the recent Supreme Court verdict in shaping India's socio-political framework and its implications for governance, individual rights, and constitutional principles. (250 words)



Answer Guidelines:

Introduction (30-40 words):

Begin by briefly stating the context of the Supreme Court verdict, its focus on constitutional principles, and its broader implications on governance and individual rights.

Main Body (170-180 words):

1. Impact on Socio-Political Framework:

- Explain how the verdict reinforces democratic principles like equality, justice, and secularism.
- Discuss the balance between individual rights and societal responsibilities.

2. Implications for Governance:

- Highlight the impact on federalism, transparency, or accountability depending on the verdict's nature.
- Address its influence on policy-making and legislative measures.

3. Effect on Individual Rights:

- Examine how the verdict strengthens or clarifies the scope of fundamental rights such as freedom of speech, equality, or right to privacy.
- Discuss any precedent it sets for future judicial decisions.

Conclusion (30-40 words):

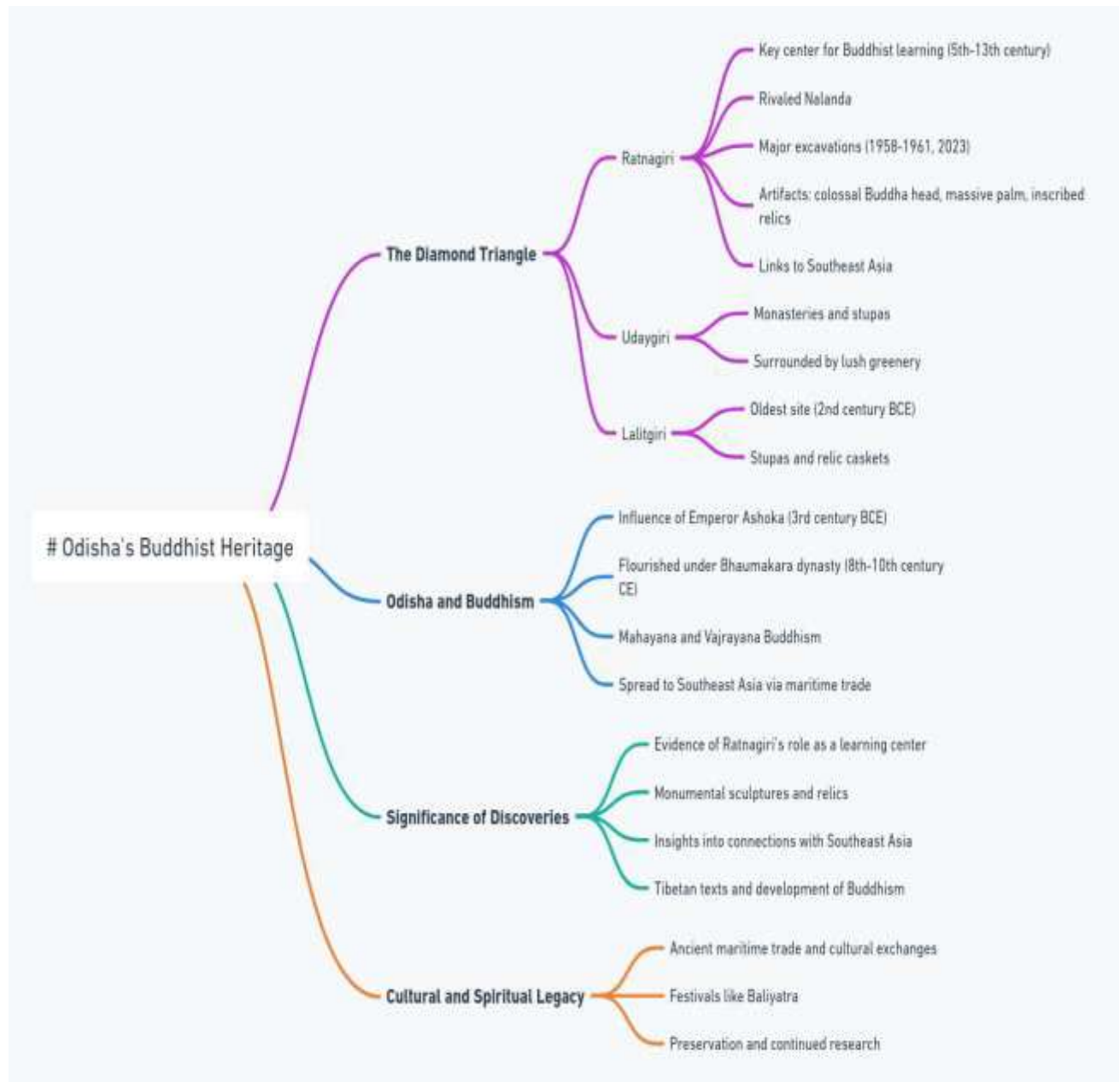
Summarize the verdict's importance in reinforcing constitutional values and its potential to shape India's governance and protect citizens' rights. Offer a forward-looking perspective on its long-term impact.

Key Pointers:

- Maintain a balanced perspective; include both benefits and potential challenges.
- Focus on constitutional principles like the rule of law, separation of powers, and fundamental rights.
- Substantiate points with examples, if relevant.



MIND MAP:



SINCE 2006