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News Analysis (11 Dec, 2018)

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Brick Temple at Bhitargaon

The temple at Bhitargaon in Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) is one of the earliest surviving **brick** temples of India.

- It was built in the 5th century A.D during the **Gupta Empire**.
- It is the oldest remaining terracotta Hindu shrine with a roof and a high Shikhara (spire) which paved the way for elaborate Nagara style of temple architecture in North India.

Brief History of Temple Architecture

- There is no evidence of the existence of temple architecture during the Vedic period.
- Over generations, worshipping was systematised and paved the way for the evolution of temple structures.
- Rock-cut architecture began to develop from the 3rd century BCE. Though the earliest rock-cut architecture is from the Mauryan dynasty, the Ajanta caves which belong to post Mauryan period are among the earliest rock-cut temples.
- As man progressed and learnt new techniques, rock-cut temples gave way to stone temples and as stone was not easily available everywhere, it gave way to brick temples.
- In the Gangetic plains, which have alluvial soil and paucity of stones and rocks, many brick structures came up.
- Though rock-cut and stone temples withstood the vagaries of time, brick temples could not survive. That is what makes the brick temple of Bhitargaon so special.

Architecture of Bhitargaon Temple

- The entrance into the sanctum shows one of the first uses of a **semi-circular doorway**.

- **Alexander Cunningham** (First Director General of the Archaeological Survey of India, 1871) called this as the 'Hindu arch' which was peculiar to India.
- The temple has a tall pyramidal spire (shikhara) above the inner sanctum (garbha griha). This shikhara became the standard feature of the **Nagara temple architecture** of India.
- The walls of the temple are decorated with terracotta sculptures of God and Goddesses like Shiva, Parvati, Ganesha, Vishnu etc. on panels separated by bold ornamental pilasters (rectangular column that projects slightly beyond the wall).
- According to Cunningham, because of the Varaha incarnation at the back of the temple, it was probably a **Vishnu temple**.

NAGARA, DRAVIDA & VESARA TEMPLES

- Temple architecture evolved slightly differently in different regions, such as the distinct features of Orissa, Kashmir and Bengal temples, but it can be generally classified under three categories- **Nagara (North)**, **Dravida (South)** and **Vesara** styles.
- The **shikhara** tower in Nagara temples has a **sloping curve** as they rise and are topped by an **amalaka** (a large fluted disk) and also a small spherical pot known as the **kalash**.□
- The Nagara style of temples were generally built on upraised platforms.
- **Kandariya Mahadeva temple** at Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh is one of the best expression of Nagara temple architecture.
- In contrast, **Dravida** towers (known separately as **vimana**) are in the form of a **stepped pyramid** that rises up linearly rather than curved.
- There is only one vimana in the Dravidian architecture on top of the main temple. The subsidiary shrines do not have vimanas, unlike in Nagara architecture.
- The **presence of water tank** inside the temple enclosure is a **unique feature of the Dravidian style**.
- Southern Indian temples are typically enclosed within a walled courtyard with a gate (**gopuram**) which over time had become even more massive and ornate than the temple itself.
- The 11th century A.D. **Brihadishwara Temple** complex (built by Rajaraja I of Imperial Cholas) at Tanjavur is a wonderful example of Dravida temple which incorporates all of these features.
- Vesara style of temple architecture flourished under the later Chalukya rulers in the 7th century A.D.
- **Vesara style** had **combined features of both Nagara school and Dravidian school** and resulted in a hybridised style.
- **Durga temple at Aihole**, Karnataka is a prominent example of Vesara style temple.

Successful Test Firing of Agni V

India successfully tested its **nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)**, Agni V which has a strike range of 5,000 km, from **Dr. Abdul Kalam Island (formerly the Wheeler Island) in Odisha**.

- This is the third successful launch of Agni-V this year (2018) and the fifth launch of the missile in a **canisterised form**.
- Agni-V is the most advanced **surface-to-surface indigenously built ballistic missile**.
- It is a **three-stage, solid fuel 17-metre tall**, and is capable of carrying a **nuclear warhead** of about 1.5 tonnes.
- Agni-V is a **fire and forget missile**, which once fired cannot be stopped, except by an interceptor missile.
- It has been developed under the **Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP)**.

IGMDP (Integrated Guided Missile Development Program)

- It was conceived by **Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam** to enable India attain self-sufficiency in field of missile technology. It was approved by **Government of India in 1983** and **completed in March 2012**.
- The **5 missiles (P-A-T-N-A)** developed under this program are:
 - **Prithvi**: Short range **surface to surface** ballistic missile.
 - **Agni**: **Ballistic missiles** with different ranges, i.e. Agni (1,2,3,4,5)
 - **Trishul**: Short range low level **surface to air missile**.
 - **Nag**: 3rd generation **anti-tank missile**.
 - **Akash**: Medium range **surface to air missile**.

The launch operations were carried out and monitored by the **Strategic Forces Command (SFC)**.

- SFC is a part of **India's Nuclear Command Authority (NCA)** which was **created in 2003** to manage India's nuclear arsenal.
- NCA is India's nodal authority responsible for command, control and operational decisions regarding India's nuclear weapons programme. It has an **Executive Council (headed by National Security Advisor)** which gives input to the **Political Council (headed by the Prime Minister)**. The Political Council, authorizes a **nuclear attack if need be**.

Canister Based Launch System

- Canister based launch system- serves as a **container for transportation**; a housing **during storage** aboard a vessel; provides **operational flexibility**.

- A canister launch system can be either **hot launch**, where the missile ignites in the cell, or **cold launch**, where the missile is expelled by gas produced by a gas generator which is not part of the missile itself, and then the missile ignites.
- **Cold launch is safer** than hot launch as the ejection system will eject the missile by itself even if there is a missile failure. In case of **Agni V, it will be a cold launch.**
- In case of hot launches the problem is the heat produced by the missile at the time of launch. The hot launch is better for small missiles as the ejection part itself will be done by using missiles own engine.
- In addition to this technology, India is also working to master the **Multiple Independent Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) technology** which is also considered as India's technological solution for Minimum Nuclear Deterrence.

The fundamental characteristic of deploying MIRVs is its ability to **deliver several warheads** along **separate trajectories**, which confers it **flexibility of multiple targeting.**

Streamlining of National Pension System

In a bid to streamline the National Pension System (NPS) and make it more attractive, the Union Cabinet has approved changes in the scheme to benefit **around 18 lakh Central government employees** covered under NPS.

The approved changes are:

- **Enhancement of the mandatory contribution** by the Central Government for its employees covered under **NPS Tier-I from the existing 10% to 14%.**
- Providing **freedom of choice for selection of Pension Funds** and pattern of investment to central government employees.
- **Payment of compensation** for non-deposit or delayed deposit of NPS **contributions during 2004-2012.**
- Tax exemption limit for lump sum **withdrawal on exit has been enhanced to 60%.** With this, the entire withdrawal will now be exempt from income tax. (At present, 40% of the total accumulated corpus utilized for purchase of annuity is already tax exempted. Out of 60% of the accumulated corpus withdrawn by the NPS subscriber at the time of retirement, 40% is tax exempt and balance 20% is taxable).
- Contribution by the Government employees **under Tier-II of NPS will now be covered under Section 80C for deduction** up to Rs. 1.50 lakh for the purpose of income tax at par with the other schemes such as General Provident Fund, Contributory Provident Fund, Employees Provident Fund and Public Provident Fund **provided that there is a lock-in period of 3 years.**

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- **Increase in the eventual accumulated corpus** of all central government employees covered under NPS.
 - Greater pension payouts after retirement **without any additional burden** on the employee.
 - **Freedom of choice for selection** of Pension Funds and investment pattern to central government employees.
 - By making NPS more attractive for its employees, government will **not only retain but also attract the best talent**.
 - The impact on the exchequer on this account is estimated to be to the **tune of around Rs. 2840 crores** for the financial year 2019-20, and will be in the **nature of a recurring expenditure**.

Background

- The **Seventh Pay Commission (7th CPC) in the year 2015** recommended for setting up of a Committee of Secretaries to address certain concerns regarding NPS.
- Accordingly, based on the recommendations of the Committee, draft Cabinet Note was placed before the Cabinet for its approval.

National Pension System

- The Central Government has introduced the National Pension System (NPS) with **effect from January 01, 2004 (except for armed forces)**.
- NPS is being implemented and regulated by **Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority** in the country.
- **National Pension System Trust (NPST)** established by PFRDA is the **registered owner of all assets under NPS**.
- NPS is structured into **two tiers**:
 - **Tier-I account**: This is the **non-withdrawable permanent retirement account** into which the accumulations are deposited and invested as per the option of the subscriber.
 - **Tier-II account**: This is a **voluntary withdrawable account** which is allowed **only when there is an active Tier I account** in the name of the subscriber. The withdrawals are permitted from this account as per the needs of the subscriber as and when claimed.
- NPS was made available **to all Citizens of India from May 01, 2009**.
- Any individual **citizen of India (both resident and Non-resident)** in the age group of **18-65 years** (as on the date of submission of NPS application) can join NPS.
- However, **OCI (Overseas Citizens of India) and PIO (Person of Indian Origin) card holders and Hindu Undivided Family (HUFs)** are **not eligible** for opening of NPS account.

PFRDA

- The Pension Fund Regulatory & Development Authority Act was **passed on 19th September, 2013**.
 - Its vision is to be a model regulator for promotion and development of an organized pension system to serve the old age income needs of people on a sustainable basis.
 - Along with NPS, it **also regulates other pension schemes** subscribed by employees of public and private sector of India.
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Center Refuses to Recognize Lingayat as Separate Religion

The Central Government has rejected the Karnataka government's proposal seeking legal recognition for Lingayats as a distinct religion.

- In March 2018, the Karnataka government accepted suggestions of Nagamohan committee and granted minority status to Lingayats. The proposal was then sent to the Centre for the final approval.
- Central Government has rejected the proposal on two grounds:
 - Lingayat has always been **classified under Hindus ever since the first official census in India in 1871** census and that Lingayat is considered as a religious sect of Hindu.
 - If Lingayat/Veerashaiva will be given the status of a separate religion, **all the members of the Scheduled Caste (SC) professing the said religion would lose their status as SC**.
- In the Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 and the Hindu Succession Act, 1956, Lingayats, Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs are included among Hindus, but Buddhists, Sikhs, and Jains have been identified by state and central governments as minority religions in 1993, 1963 and 2014 respectively except the Lingayats.

Lingayats

- The term **Lingayat denotes a person who wears a personal linga**, an iconic form of god Shiva, on the body which is received during the initiation ceremony.
- Lingayats are the followers of the 12th-century social reformer-philosopher poet, Basaveshwara.
- Basaveshwara was against the caste system and Vedic rituals.
- The **Lingayats are strict monotheists**. They enjoy the worship of only one God, namely, Linga (Shiva).
- The word 'Linga' does not mean Linga established in temples, but universal consciousness qualified by the universal energy (Shakti).

- Lingayats had been classified as a Hindu subcaste called **“Veerashaiva Lingayats”** and they are considered to be Shaivites.

Separate Religion for Lingayats

- Lingayats had distanced itself from Hindu Veerashaivas because the latter followed the Vedas and supported the caste system, to which Basaveshwara was against.
- Veerashaivas are the followers of the five peethas (religious centers), called Pancha Peethas. These peethas are set up on similar lines to the four peethas set up by Adi Shankara.

Basaveshwara

- Basaveshwara was a **12th century spiritual master in Karnataka**.
- Popularly known as Basavanna, he propagated moral, ethical and spiritual values for a peaceful and purposeful life.
- **He formed a new spiritual institution which was based on democratic principles** to spread universal love and brotherhood. Anyone, irrespective of caste, could become a member as long as they were pious and of good character.
- Basavanna’s mission for the formation of a new society through **Anubhava Mantapa** was based on certain noble principles:
 - There is only one God.
 - Complete surrender to God in devotion.
 - Compassion is the root of all religions. Treat all living beings with kindness and live for the welfare of all.

Important Facts for Prelims (11th December 2018)

39th GCC Summit

- 39th Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- GCC summit took place amid a rift between member states due to the blockade of Qatar by Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since June 2017, the war in Yemen, diplomatic crisis over Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi's assassination.
- **Gulf Cooperation Council**
 - The GCC is a political and economic alliance of countries in the Arabian Peninsula.
 - It was established in 1981 to foster socioeconomic, security, and cultural cooperation.
 - Members of GCC: **United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait.**

Kaiga Nuclear Power Plant

- Karnataka's Kaiga Nuclear Power Plant has created a world record for the longest uninterrupted operation for 941 days, thereby breaking the earlier record of 940 days by the United Kingdom.
 - It is located in the surroundings of the Western Ghats at Kaiga in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka.
 - It is a cluster of four Pressurized Heavy Water Reactors of 220 MW each indigenously developed by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India (NPCIL).
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