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Lalitgiri- a treasure trove of Buddhism in Odisha

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Prime Minister will inaugurate the **museum at Lalitgiri in Odisha** which is one of the earliest Buddhist settlements.

- Three sites - **Lalitgiri (the red hill)**, **Ratnagiri (hill of precious gems)**, **Udayagiri (the hill of the rising sun)** are known as the **diamond triangle of Odisha** representing a rich heritage of architecture and sculpture of the post Mauryan era Indian art which touched a new zenith of excellence.
- **Xuanzang** (Hieun T'sang) the Chinese pilgrim, who visited Orissa during 639 A.D. left a vivid graphic account about the flourishing state of Buddhism.
- The discovery of a huge number of sculptures, images, antiquity, fragments, stone tablets, potteries, coins, stone and terracotta tablets, and many huge stupas cemented the fact that these three places described by Xuanzang are the ruins of a university complex called **Pushpagiri University** which shared an **equal status with Nalanda and Vikramshila universities**.
- The Diamond Triangle of Odisha shows that Buddhism was followed quite widely in Odisha and the place was also a centre of learning and excellence.

Lalitgiri

- Lalitgiri is believed to be the most sacred among the three sites as it unearthed a massive stupa where a **relic of Buddha was discovered inside a stone casket**.
- During excavation structural remains of a large brick built **apsidal chaitya griha** with a circular stupa in the center was found. The discovery of such edifice is first of its kind in the Buddhist context in Orissa.
- Majority of the sculptures unearthed from excavation are the figures of Buddha in different postures belonging to **Mahayanistic phase of Buddhism**.
- Inscribed potsherds belonging to different time spans i.e. post Mauryan period to 8th-9th century A.D. have been found which suggest that the Lalitgiri was under occupation by the both **Hinayana and Mahayana sects**.

- In subsequent period the site came under the control of **Vajrayana faith of Buddhism** patronized by the ruling Bhaumakaras (9th-10th cent A.D).
- It is evident how Hinduism made an entry into Buddhism through Vajrayana. All Buddhist gods and goddesses have replicas of various Hindu gods. Some of them like Aparajita Tara, Padmapani, Hariti, Vajrapani, Manjusri are close to common Hindu gods.
- **Lalitgiri** is one of the earliest Buddhist sites of Orissa shows the cultural **continuity right from the post Mauryan period to 13th century A.D without any break.**

Udaygiri

- Udayagiri known as **Madhavapura Mahavihara** was a prominent centre of Buddhism between the 7th and 12th centuries.
- The excavation had partially revealed a double storied monastic complex datable to 8th century A.D. and important antiquities images of Buddha, Tara, Manjusri, Avalokitesvara, Jatamukuta Lokesvara and terracotta sealings.

Ratnagiri

- Excavation of this site brought to light the remains of a magnificent Buddhist establishment consisting of a stupa, monastic complex, shrines, votive stupas, myriad of sculptures, architectural fragments and other antiquities.
- Many **giant Buddha heads** are found here which resemble the Buddha heads found in **Barbadur in Indonesia** and **Anuradhapura in Sri Lanka.**