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Gupta Period Temple Remains Found: UP

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Why in News

Recently, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** discovered remains of an ancient temple dating back to the **Gupta period (5th century)** in **Bilsarh village** in Uttar Pradesh's **Etah district**.

The Bilsarh site was **declared 'protected' in 1928 by the ASI**.

Key Points

- **About:**

- Two pillars were excavated on which there is an inscription about **Kumaragupta I**, the powerful ruler of Gupta dynasty, in '**sankh lipi**' (conch script or shell script) typical of the 5th century AD.
 - The **Guptas were the first to build structural temples**, distinctly different from the ancient rock-cut temples.
- The inscription was **deciphered as Mahendraditya** which was the **title of king Kumargupta I** who had even conducted **ashwamedh yagya** during his rule.
 - The **statue of a horse having similar inscription** is at the state museum in **Lucknow**.
 - **Ashvamedha Yagya** is a horse sacrifice ritual followed by the Srauta tradition of Vedic religion.
- The discovery becomes significant since only two other structural temples from the Gupta age have been found so far — **Dashavatara Temple (Deogarh)** and **Bhitargaon Temple (Kanpur Dehat)**.

- **Shankhalipi Script:**



- Also called “**shell-script**” is found in inscriptions across north-central India and dates to between the **4th and 8th centuries**.
 - Both **Shankhalipi and Brahmi are stylised scripts** used primarily for names and signatures.
 - The inscriptions consist of a **small number of characters**, suggesting that the shell inscriptions are **names or auspicious symbols** or a combination of the two.
- It was **discovered in 1836** on a brass trident in Uttarakhand’s Barahat by English scholar **James Prinsep**.
- **Prominent sites with shell inscriptions:** Mundeshwari Temple (Bihar), the **Udayagiri Caves** (Madhya Pradesh), Mansar (Maharashtra) and some of the cave sites of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

These inscriptions are also reported in Indonesia’s Java and Borneo.

- **Kumaragupta-I:**

- He was the **Successor of Chandragupta-II** and had a long reign from **414 to 455 A.D.**
- He performed the Asvamedha Yajna which was confirmed by **Asvamedha coins**. The discovery of **his 1395 coins confirms his extension towards the South**.
- His period is also regarded as **forming part of the Golden Age of the Guptas**.
- Towards the middle of the fifth century A.D. The reign of the Kumaragupta-I was **disturbed by the revolt of Pushyamitra tribe** and the invasion of the **Hunas**.

His greatest achievement was his **repulsing the attack of the Pushyamitra**.
- After the death of Kumaragupta-I **Skandagupta succeeded in 455 A.D.** and reigned from **455 to 467 A.D.**

Gupta Empire

- **About:**
 - The Gupta Empire stretched across **northern, central and parts of southern India** between **320 and 550 CE**.
 - The period is noted for its achievements in the **arts, architecture, sciences, religion, and philosophy**.
 - **Chandragupta I (320 – 335 CE) started a rapid expansion** of the Gupta Empire and soon established himself as the first sovereign ruler of the empire.
 - It marked the **end of 500 hundred years of domination of the provincial powers** and resulting disquiet that began with the **fall of the Mauryas**.
 - It began a period of overall prosperity and growth that continued for the next two and half centuries which came to be **known as a Golden Age in India's history**.
- **Governance:**

The efficiency of their **martial system was well known**. The large kingdom was divided into smaller **pradesha** (provinces).
- **Trade:**
 - **Gold and silver coins** were issued in great numbers which is a general indicator of the health of the economy.
 - Trade and commerce flourished both within the country and outside. **Silk, cotton, spices, medicine, priceless gemstones, pearl, precious metal and steel** were exported by sea.
- **Religion:**

They were devout **Vaishnava (Hindus who worship the Supreme Creator as Vishnu)** themselves, yet that did not prevent them from being **tolerant towards the believers of Buddhism and Jainism**.
- **Literature:**
 - Poet and playwright **Kalidasa created** such epics as *Abhijnanasakuntalam*, *Malavikagnimitram*, *Raghuvansha* and *Kumarsambhaba*. **Harishena** composed *Allahabad Prasasti*, **Sudraka** wrote *Mricchakatika*, **Vishakhadatta** created *Mudrarakshasa* and **Vishnusharma** penned *Panchatantra*.
 - **Varahamihira** wrote *Brihatsamhita* and also contributed to the fields of astronomy and astrology. Genius mathematician and astronomer **Aryabhata** wrote Surya Siddhanta which covered several aspects of geometry, trigonometry and cosmology. **Shanku** devoted himself to creating texts about Geography.
- **Architecture:**

The finest examples of painting, sculpture and architecture of the period can be found in **Ajanta, Ellora, Sarnath, Mathura, Anuradhapura and Sigiriya**.

Source: IE