Nagardhan Excavations and Vakataka Dynasty

Why in News

Recently, archaeological excavations were carried out at **Nagardhan village** in Ramtek Taluk near **Nagpur, Maharashtra.**

- The area surrounding the Nagardhan Fort in the village has the archaeological remains.
    - The Nagardhan Fort was constructed during the **Gond Raja period** and later renovated and re-used by the **Bhosales of Nagpur** during the late 18^{th} and 19^{th} centuries.
- The excavations have provided evidence on the life, religious affiliations and trade practices of the **Vakataka dynasty.**
    - Nagardhan is understood to have served as a capital of the Vakataka kingdom.

Vakataka Dynasty

- It originated in the **central Deccan in the mid-3^{rd} century CE** and its empire is believed to have extended from **Malwa and Gujarat in the north** to the **Tungabhadra in the south** and from the **Arabian Sea in the west** to the **Bay of Bengal in the east.**
- The Vakataka rulers followed the Shaiva sect of Hinduism.
- **Animal rearing** was one of the main occupations of the people. **Remains of domestic animals** like **cattle, goat, sheep, pig, cat, horse and fowl** were traced in an earlier study.
- The Vakataka rulers forged several **matrimonial alliances** with other dynasties of their times. One of the key alliances was with **Prabhavatigupta of the Gupta dynasty (Vaishnavites),** which was then **ruling north India.**
    - Prabhavatigupta was the chief queen of the **Vakataka king Rudrasena II** and took over as queen after the sudden death of her husband. She ruled for about 10 years until her **son Pravarasena II** succeeded.
- **Queen Prabhavatigupta and Vaishnavism**
    - The researchers believe that the practice of worshipping Narasimha in Maharashtra emerged from Ramtek, and that Queen Prabhavatigupta had a pivotal role in propagation of Vaishnava practices in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra.
    - Some of the temples identified as Keval Narasihma, Rudra Narasimha and the one dedicated to Varaha could be traced to Ramtek, and showcase strong affinity to the incarnations of Lord Vishnu. None of these religious structures was, however, present here until the Queen took the throne.

Findings and their Significance

- It is the **first time clay sealings** have been excavated from Nagardhan.

    - The **oval-shaped** sealing belongs to the period when **Prabhavatigupta** was the queen of the Vakataka dynasty.
    - It bears her name in the **Brahmi script,** along with the **depiction of a conch.** The presence of the conch is a sign of the **Vaishnava affiliation** that the Guptas held.
    - The sealings were introduced and issued under Prabhavatigupta's rule which shows her importance and stature as a woman.

        - The Vakataka rulers followed the Shaiva sect of Hinduism while the Guptas followed Vaishnava sect. Queen's powerful personality allowed her to follow the sect of her choice.
- The sealing was traced on top of a **mega wall** which could have been part of a royal structure at the capital city.
- The **copperplate issued by Queen Prabhavatigupta** starts with a **genealogy of the Guptas,** mentioning the Queen's grandfather **Samudragupta** and her father **Chandragupta II.**
- Vakatakas **traded with Iran and beyond, through the Mediterranean Sea** and the sealings are believed to be used as **official royal permission** issued from the capital.

Source: IE

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