

1200-year-old miniature votive stupas discovered

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In news– Archeological Survey of India (ASI) has discovered two 1200-year-old miniature votive stupas recently.

About miniature votive stupas-

- They were discovered during landscaping activities near Sarai Tila mound on the premises of 'Nalanda Mahavihara', a world heritage site in Nalanda district.
- The stupas (offered in fulfilment of a vow), carved from stone, depict Buddha figures.
- Beginning in the 7th century CE in India, small miniature terracotta stupas became popular as votive offerings.

About the Nalanda Mahavihara-

- The Nalanda Mahavihara site comprises the archaeological remains of a monastic and scholastic institution dating from the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE.
- It includes stupas, shrines, viharas (residential and educational buildings) and important art works in stucco, stone and metal.
- Nalanda stands out as the most ancient university of the Indian subcontinent. It engaged in the organized transmission of knowledge over an uninterrupted period of 800 years.
- It presents a key archaeological evidence of a truly international centre for organised learning.
- **Nalanda Mahavihara was founded by Kumargupta I of the Gupta dynasty in 5th century CE.**
- It was **patronized by various rulers including King Harshavardhana of Kannauj (7th century CE) and the Pala**

rulers (8th – 12th century CE) as well as various scholars.

- Later, number of factors spread over centuries caused the decline of this famed institution.
- The same region, later, saw emergence of a number of reputed educational institutions like Vikramshila and Odantpuri but the eminence of Nalanda remains unrivaled.
- About six centuries after Nalanda's decline, the site was **first discovered and reported by Sir Francis Buchanan**.
- The site was systematically excavated and consolidated by Archaeological Survey of India from 1915 to 1937 and again from 1974 to 1982.
- Built ensembles in Nalanda are physical manifestation of influence of ancient Indian pedagogy where planning, architecture and artistic traditions of Indian sub-continent and beyond developed into subsequent architectural and artistic prototypes.
- **Nalanda distinguished itself as the earliest planned university of the Indian subcontinent.** Thematic and iconographic assimilation of features from major art-centres of the sub-continent with local practices is evident in art of Nalanda.
- While Nalanda stucco influenced practices in Thailand, its metal art influenced art of the Malayan archipelago, Nepal, Myanmar and Tibet travelling out through scholars.