

Bamiyan Buddhas

April 1, 2022

In news : Recently, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has said that it would protect the ancient Buddha statues in Mes Aynak, also the site of a copper mine where the Taliban are hoping for Chinese investment. This Taliban's changed stance on the statues has brought back into conversations the tragedy of the razing of the Bamiyan Buddhas in March 2001.

Mes Aynak statues-

- **Mes Aynak, also called Mis Ainak or Mis-e-Ainak, is a site 40 km southeast of Kabul, Afghanistan, located in a barren region of Logar Province.**
- **Mes Aynak contains Afghanistan's largest copper deposit, as well as the remains of an ancient settlement with over 400 Buddha statues, stupas and a 40 ha (100 acres) monastery complex.**
- Archaeologists have found remnants of an older 5,000-year-old Bronze Age site beneath the Buddhist level, including an **ancient copper smelter.**
- **The site contains artifacts recovered from the Bronze Age, and some of the artifacts recovered have dated back over 3000 years.**
- The site's orientation on the Silk Road has yielded a mixture of elements from China and India.
- **Afghanistan's eagerness to unearth the copper below the site is leading to the site's destruction rather than its preservation.**

About Bamiyan Buddhas-

- The Bamiyan valley, in the Hindu Kush mountains and along the river Bamiyan, was a key node of the early Silk Routes, emerging as a hub of both commercial and cultural exchange.
- The sandstone carvings in Afghanistan's Bamiyan valley

were once the world's tallest Buddhas – but they were lost forever when the Taliban blew them up in 2001.

- The Buddhas of Bamiyan were two 6th-century monumental statues of Gautama Buddha carved into the side of a cliff in the Bamiyan valley of central Afghanistan, 130 kilometres northwest of Kabul at an elevation of 2,500 metres.
- Carbon dating of the structural components of the Buddhas has determined that the smaller 38 m (125 ft) “Eastern Buddha” was built around 570 AD, and the larger 55 m (180 ft) “Western Buddha” was built around 618 AD.
- The statues represented a later evolution of the classic blended style of Gandhara art.
- In their Roman draperies and with two different mudras, the Bamiyan Buddhas were great examples of a confluence of Gupta, Sassanian and Hellenistic artistic styles.
- *Salsal* and *Shamama*, as they were called by the locals, were said to be male and female.
- *Salsal* means “light shines through the universe”; *Shamama* is “Queen Mother”.
- The statues were set in niches on either ends of a cliff side and hewn directly from the sandstone cliffs.
- The rise of Bamiyan was closely connected with the spread of Buddhism across Central Asia, and that in turn was linked to the political and economic currents of that time.
- Early in the first century AD, a semi-nomadic tribe called the Kushans swept out of Bactria and became unavoidable middlemen between China, India and Rome, and prospered on the revenues of the Silk Road.
- They fostered a syncretic culture, in which tribal traditions from Central Asia fused with artistic conventions derived from the Hellenized Mediterranean and with the ideologies coming from Buddhist India, as reflected in the remarkable cultural legacy to be found in Bamiyan.
- The two colossal Buddhas were only a part of several

other structures, such as stupas, smaller seated and standing Buddhas, and wall paintings in caves, spread in and around surrounding valleys.

- Following the fall of the Bamiyan Buddhas, UNESCO included the remains in its list of world heritage sites in 2003, with subsequent efforts made to restore and reconstruct the Buddhas in their niches with the pieces available.