

Buddhist monastery complex discovered at Bharatpur of Bengal

January 24, 2023

In news— A Buddhist monastery was found during recent excavations at Bharatpur in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal.

About the site-

- **The site was initially excavated almost fifty years ago between 1972 and 1975** when archeologists from ASI and from Burdwan University found a Buddhist stupa at the site.
- **The site lay unexcavated for almost fifty years.**
- Archeologists were looking at the cultural sequence of the stupa from where black and red ware pottery belonging to the Chalcolithic Age was also recovered.
- A Buddhist stupa cannot exist in isolation, and the recent excavations have revealed the presence of an extended monastery complex.
- So far, they have exposed some **structures which appear to be the outer wall of the monastery, containing nine layers of brick and a small circular structure**, probably a stupa.
- According to experts, **what makes the site unique in terms of Buddhist sites in the State is the presence of a large stupa along with a monastery complex and black and red ware pottery** from the Chalcolithic or Copper Age.
- In other sites across West Bengal, such as Karnasubarna in Murshidabad, Moghalamari in Paschim Medinipur and Jagjivanpur in Malda, archeologists have found only smaller votive stupas.
- **A Buddhist stupa is a commemorative monument** usually

housing sacred relics associated with the Buddha or other saints or priests, whereas votive stupas have similar significance but are smaller structures originating in eight cylindrical structures.

- When archeologists excavated the site in the 1970s, they found black and red ware pottery, associated with the Chalcolithic Age which predates any Buddhist structures.
- **The site was important for two main reasons: one, because it is an early village settlement on the bank of the river Damodar which could date to around 2000 BCE; and two, the Buddhist monastery complex.**
- Archaeologists said that the **site could have been a nucleus of an early village farming** site from where sites radiated to other areas along the other bank of the Damodar and **other rivers like Ajoy and Darakeshwar.**
- Referring to other pre-historic sites in the region, archaeologists said that there are early village farming sites at Dihar and Pakhanna on the other bank of the Damodar in the State's Bankura district.
- **In the 1970s when the site was excavated along with the stupa, five beautiful seated sculptures of the Buddha in Bhumisparsha Mudra** – with all five fingers of the right hand extended to touch the ground were found. These miniature sculptures, each about 30 cm in height, were most likely used for worship in the monastery.