

Chilika Lake

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In News: Recently, The Chilika lake in Odisha, Asia's largest brackish water lake, was once part of the Bay of Bengal, a study by the marine archaeology department of the National Institute of Oceanography (NIO), Goa, has found.

Key Finding in Study

- The process of the formation of the Chilika might have begun in the later part of the Pleistocene epoch, around 20,000 years ago.
- India's peninsular river Mahanadi carried a heavy load of silt and dumped part of it at its delta. As the sediment-laden river met the Bay of Bengal, sand bars were formed near its mouth.
- These created a backflow of the sea water into the sluggish fresh water at the estuary, resulting in the huge brackish water lake.
- Marine archaeological studies on the Odisha coast clearly show that the Chilika once acted as a safe harbour for cargo ships bound for southeast Asia and other parts of the world. The lake has been a useful centre for maritime activities since the third millennium before the Common Era (CE).
- The Chilika is 64 kilometres long in the north-south direction and 13.5 km wide in the east-west direction.
- The sea connected with the lake near Satapada through a shallow and narrow channel. The connecting channel was obstructed by shoals, sand spits and sandbars, thus restricting the outflow of water and also checking the tidal flow into the lake.
- The lake had become shallower with the passage of time due to the deposition of sediments brought by the Mahanadi as outflow from the lake was restricted.

Historical Key Points about Chilika lake

- Greek geographer Claudius Ptolemy (150 CE) described Palur as an important port of Kalinga and referred to it as 'Paloura'.
- This port was situated close to the 'point of departure' located outside the southern tip of the lake at Kantiagarh, from where ships used to sail directly for Southeast Asia.
- Stone anchors and hero stones (memorial stones commemorating ancient heroes) from Manikapatna, Palur and the adjoining onshore regions of the Chilika suggest that the present brackish water lagoon was in fact a part of the Bay of Bengal.
- Chinese pilgrim Xuanzang (7th century CE) recorded 'Cheli-ta-lo-Ching' as a flourishing port.
- This port was located at Chhatargarh on the banks of the Chilika. The Brahmanda Purana (10th century CE approximately) says the Chilika was an important centre of trade and commerce, with ships sailing to Java, Malaya and Ceylon.
- The famous Sanskrit poet Kalidas called the king of Kalinga 'Madhodhipati' or 'Lord of the Ocean'.

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