ASI Survey of Bhojshala Complex

For Prelims: Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), King Bhoja, Bhojashala, Vagdevi temple

For Mains: Role of Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Temple Architecture

Source: TH

Why in News?

The Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh **High Court** has ordered the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** to conduct a scientific survey of the **Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex** in Dhar district to clarify its original nature.

What is the Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque Complex?

- **About:**
  - The **Bhojshala Temple-Kamal Maula Mosque complex** was originally a temple of **goddess Sarasvati** built by Parawara King Bhoja **in 11th Century AD.**
  - The mosque is built using structural members of the temple. The monument also retains some slabs inscribed with **Sanskrit and Prakrit** literary works.
  - Noted as a great patron of art and literature, **King Bhoja** is said to have established a school, now known as **Bhojashala.**
  - Under an agreement with the ASI, Hindus perform puja in the temple every Tuesday, and Muslims offer Namaz every Friday.
- **Dispute:**
  - The controversy revolves around the **original status of the site as a temple.**
  - The petitioner cites an ASI report claiming that the **original Bhojshala and Vagdevi temples** were demolished to build a mosque. A survey was requested to determine the actual history of the site.
  - One respondent challenged the suit's maintainability, citing the ***principle of res judicata*** (a thing adjudged), noting a similar petition was **dismissed** by the High Court's Principal Bench in 2003.
- **High Court's Order:**
  - The court noted that the temple's character remains mysterious until determined. All parties agree on the need to clarify the monument's nature, a task assigned to the ASI under the **Monument Act, 1958.**
    - The court mandated the ASI to promptly conduct a **comprehensive scientific survey**, excavation, and investigation using advanced methods like GPR-GPS **and** carbon dating, encompassing not only the site but also its 50-meter peripheral ring area.

Who was Raja Bhoj of Gurjara-Pratihara Dynasty?

- **Bhoja** was the **Pratihara dynasty's greatest emperor** and the actual **founder** of the **empire.**
    - The Gurjara-Pratiharas came to prominence in the second quarter of the 8th century, when they offered successful resistance to the Arabs.
    - The Pratiharas who ruled over Kannauj for a long time are also called Gurjara-Pratiharas. The meaning of the word Pratihara is "doorman."
        - They were in the tripartite struggle with the Palas and Rashtrakutas over dominance in the Kannauj, Malwa, and upper Ganga valley regions.
        - He **defeated the Pala king Devapala and the Rashtrakuta king Amoghavarsha**, establishing the Gurjara-Pratiharas as the dominant power in northern India during his reign.
- **Bhoja I/Mihir Bhoja (836 – 885 AD):**
    - The best-known **Gurjara-Pratihara king was Bhoja,** grandson of Nagabhata II.
    - A glorious chapter of the history of the Pratiharas begins with the accession of Mihirabhoja.
    - Mihirabhoja ascended to the throne in 836 AD. He ruled the Pratiharas for more than 46 years and is regarded as their most popular king.
    - He reorganized and **consolidated the empire inherited from his ancestors** and ushered in an era of prosperity for the Pratiharas.
    - **Kannauj which was likewise known as Mahodaya** was regarded as the capital of his empire.
        - The Skandhavara military camp at Mahodaya is mentioned in the **Barrah Copper Plate inscription.**
        - The Pratihara rulers reportedly had India's strongest cavalry, according to Arab travellers.
    - He was a great follower of Vaishnavism and assumed the title of “Adivaraha”.
        - **Al-Masudi, an Arab traveller, gave him the title "King Baura."**
    - The Arabs of Sindh, the Chandalas, and the Kalachuris all acknowledged his supremacy.

What are the Methods Adopted by the ASI for Excavation?

- **Invasive Methods:**
    - **Excavation**, the most invasive **archaeological technique**, involves digging using **stratigraphic principles** to gather information about the past while simultaneously destroying it.
        - **Stratigraphy** is adopted by archaeologists to peel off layers in reverse order and understand the **logical formation of the archaeological record.**
- **Non-Invasive Methods:** Non-invasive methods are used when investigations are undertaken inside a **built structure** and no excavation is permitted. It has several Methods:
    - **Active Methods:** Inject energy into the ground and measure the response. The methods provide an estimate of the **ground’s material properties**, such as **density, electrical resistance, and wave velocity.**
        - **Seismic Techniques**: Use shock waves to study subsurface structures.
        - **Electromagnetic Methods:** Measure electromagnetic responses after energy injection.
    - **Passive Methods:** Measure existing physical properties.
        - **Magnetometry:** Detect magnetic anomalies caused by buried structures.
        - **Gravity Surveying:** Measure gravitational force variations due to subsurface features.
    - **Ground-Penetrating Radar (GPR):**
        - ASI uses GPR to produce a **3-D model** of buried archaeological features.
        - GPR operates by introducing a short radar impulse from a surface antenna and records the time and magnitude of return signals from the subsoil.
        - Radar beam spreads like a cone, causing reflections before the antenna passes over the object.
        - Radar beams spread out in a cone, leading to reflections that may not directly correspond to physical dimensions, creating false images.
    - **Carbon Dating:**
        - Determine **organic material age** by measuring carbon content (C-14).

What are the Limitations of Various Methods in Archaeological Surveys?

- Similar physical properties of different materials can generate the same response, leading to **ambiguity** in identifying targets.
- The **data collected is limited** and contains **measurement errors,** making it challenging to accurately estimate the spatial distribution of properties.
- Archaeological structures are often made of **heterogeneous materials** with complex geometry, making data interpretation challenging.
- Geophysical tools might not accurately reconstruct target images, especially in complex scenarios.
- In cases like disputes over religious sites, **emotional and political factors** can influence interpretations and decisions.

Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI, under the **Ministry of Culture,** is the premier organization for the archaeological research and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation.
- It administers more than 3650 ancient monuments, archaeological sites, and remains of national importance.
- Its activities include carrying out surveys of antiquarian remains, exploration and excavation of archaeological sites, conservation and maintenance of protected monuments, etc.
- It was founded in 1861 by **Alexander Cunningham**- the first Director-General of ASI. Alexander Cunningham is also known as the **"Father of Indian Archaeology".**

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Prelims

Q. With reference to the history of India, consider the following pairs: (2020)

	Famous Place	Present State
1.	Bhilsa	Madhya Pradesh
2.	Dwarasamudra	Maharashtra
3.	Girinagar	Gujarat
4.	Sthanesvara	Uttar Pradesh

Which of the pairs given above are correctly matched?

(a) 1 and 3 only
(b) 1 and 4 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 2 and 4 only

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q.1 Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss **(2013)**

Q.2 Indian philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss. **(2020)**