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## Life, work and legend of Adi Shankaracharya

### Context

May 6 marked the 1234<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Adi Shankaracharya.

### Background

- Jagadguru Adi Shankaracharya (788–820 CE) was born in Kaladi in Kerala and, travelled the length and breadth of India.
- He travelled from the southernmost tip of the country to Kashmir in the north, Gujarat in the west and Odisha in the east, and also omkareshwar debating spiritual scholars everywhere, preaching his beliefs, establishing 'mathas' at Sringeri, Dwaraka, Puri and Joshimatha to take his teaching forward.

### Contributions of Adi Shankaracharya

- **Reconciliation of fragmented religious cults:** Adi Shankaracharya came at a time when Hinduism was facing challenges due to rise in Buddhism and Jainism and was crippled with orthodoxy and ritualism. He witnessed fragmented religious cults in India and worked to reconcile them. This led to beginning of **Advaitvada or Monotheism**.
- **Advaita Vedanta School of Hindu philosophy:** Advaita Vedanta School of Hindu philosophy became the most influential of the multiple schools of philosophy and theology that characterise Hinduism.
  - ▶ Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) is **Tat Twam Asi or Thou Art That**, the famous phrase from the Chhandogya Upanishad, which perceives the Self (Atman) as the Absolute Reality (Brahman).
  - ▶ Brahman is the sole cause, creator and consumer of the universe. It says that there is no duality between creator (Brahma) and the created soul (Atma). To follow this, he advocated "**Gyana marg**".
- **Revival of Hinduism:** He is credited with revival of Hinduism by establishing an organizational structure for its survival. He established mathas in four corners of the country, to unify the divided Hinduism and is credited with the philosophical 'defeat' of Bauddhas
- **Author:** Adi Shankara is generally identified as the author of 116 works — among them the celebrated commentaries (bhashyas) on 10 Upanishads, the Brahmasutra and the Gita, and poetic works including Vivekachudamani, Maneesha Panchakam, and Saundaryalahiri.
  - ▶ Some scholars have argued that Saundaryalahiri and Maneesha Panchakam are not his works, but attributions.
- **Philosophical discussions:** He engaged in lot of philosophical discussions and debates regarding Mahayana Buddhism and Vedanta. The biggest difference between the two is of Atman. One says it is infinite while the other says it is zero. He said there is diversity in this world but we all are one from inside. He connected zero and Infinity, atma with body, Buddhism and Hinduism, Agama and Nigama parampara. This was his greatest contribution.
- **Jagat mithya Brahma Satyam:** He said "**Jagat mithya Brahma Satyam**" and "**jivo brahmaiva narah**". It means Brahman (name of the Ultimate Reality) is the only truth, the world is illusory, and there is ultimately no difference between the individual Self and the Brahman.
  - ▶ The world cannot be false because we all clearly see and perceive it.
  - ▶ Shankaracharya says that the world is not true either, because it is constantly changing and everything that the world has to offer is temporary, transient and impermanent.
  - ▶ In saying "**Jivo brahmaiva narah**", Shankara is conveying that the realization of the individual Self, Atman, Life Energy in its purest form (without the ego) is nothing but realizing the Brahman, the Almighty Energy.

## Preservation of Ancient Art forms in India

### Context:

Prime Minister commended Sagar Mule from Goa, involved in preserving the centuries-old Kaavi form.

### Kaavi form of Painting

- Kaavi form of painting was introduced by the Portuguese who ruled Goa until 1961.
- It is a wall art done in bright red and white shades and found in the Konkan region of the country, especially in temples of Goa, Maharashtra and Karnataka.
- It is a form of etching on the walls of temples and homes that depicts the ancient history of India.
- Lack of patronage from the government and locals forced art forms like Kaavi into oblivion.



### Significance of Ancient Art forms

- The art is a social expression of the community to celebrate different occasions in life.
- Indian arts include visual, performing and literary arts with multiple art types in each category.
- The cultural activities are vital to generate livelihoods along with binding force within the society.
- The cultures and traditions have been passed on from generation to generation in the form of visual, performing and literary arts etc.

### Need for Preservation of Ancient art forms in India

- Despite the rapid industrialization of the world, the rural communities continue to be the **real flag bearers of our heritage traditions**. Ironically, the developing and under-served rural population is actually the one still practicing the ancient cultures of the world.

- But with the increasing urbanization, traditions and cultures are fast eroding.
- Increasing living costs and urban aspirations for a convenient life, brings the rural population to the cities.
- In the process of migration, the ancient practices are either looked down upon as 'backward' or are forgotten.
- Dying Arts and Crafts of India includes **Chamba rumal paintings, Madhubani Paintings, craft of Kendrapara, Handloom Weaving, rangoli designs** and portraits and many others.
- Indian government awards **Geographical tag** to these art forms to protect it from getting printed or produced in non-traditional ways.
  - ▶ In spite of which, art forms like Madhubani Paintings or Warli or Kalamkari of India are frequently printed and even sold through high end fashion retail houses, in the name of promoting a traditional art.

### Government Schemes

- Government has started many initiatives to preserve the rich art heritage of the country, such as,
  - ▶ Scheme for Conservation of Wall Painting (1996-97)
  - ▶ Ek Bharat Shreshth Bharat programme
  - ▶ Tribal haats
  - ▶ GI tag to the local products, e-haat, etc.

## Promoting Cultural Tourism in India

### Context:

Kerala Tourism department live-streamed Theyyam performances to promote cultural tourism

### Significance of Cultural Tourism

- India has always been famous for its rich heritage and ancient culture. It is a mosaic of multicultural experiences. With a rich heritage and myriad attractions, the country is among the most popular tourist destinations in the world.
- It covers an area of 32, 87,263 sq. km, extending from the snow-covered Himalayan heights to the tropical rain forests of the south
- This cultural richness goes a long way toward projecting India as the ultimate **cultural tourism destination**.
- Cultural tourism brings us closer to the local and world culture, gives us the chance to know both tangible cultural heritage (historical centers, urban landscapes, museums), as well as intangible (customs, legends, music, dances, traditional cooking).
- It provides us with new knowledge, and teaches us and at the same time educates.
- It inculcates in us human values such as respect, tolerance, recognition and appreciation of opposing opinions, the valuation of personal identity, as well as the knowledge of national heritage that gives us national values.
- Popular places in India famous for Cultural Tourism are: - **Varanasi, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Udaipur, Karnataka etc.**

## Krishna and his many forms across India

### Context:

A new book features 60 miniature works from the Nathdwara Painting.

### About Nathdwara Paintings

- Nathdwara paintings refers to a painting tradition and school of artists that emerged in Nathdwara, a town 40 kms north of Udaipur city, in the Western state of Rajasthan in India.
- The Nathdwara school is a subset of the Mewar school of painting and is seen as an important school in the 17th and 18th century miniature paintings
- The sub-styles of Mewar painting include Udaigarh, Devgarh and Nathdwara as important centers of miniature production.
- Nathdwara paintings are of different sub-styles of which Pichhwai paintings are the most popular. The word Pichwai derives from the Sanskrit words 'Pich' meaning back and 'Wais' meaning hanging.
- The central figure is often that of Shrinathji — Lord Krishna as a seven-year-old boy — with crescent-shaped eyes, a garland of lotus buds around his neck. He is seen symbolically raising Giri Govardhan in his left hand while his right hand rests on his waist. A diamond shines on his chin.
- Nathdwara is a highly revered pilgrim centre for the Vaishnavites, especially those who belong to the 'Pushti Marg' sect (founded by Shree Vallabacharya). Shrinathji is considered a reincarnation of Krishna.



### Different forms of Krishna across India

- During the explosion of Bhakti movement in India. Several poems and songs were written in an emotionally charged language that expressed love and devotion to God. Krishna came to have many local manifestations and came to be associated particular temples which became very famous with time.
- As we have seen Krishna is called "shrinathji" in Rajasthan. He is Lord Jagannatha in Puri, Odisha. Shrinathji is worshipped alone while Jagannatha with his brother Balarama and sister Subhadra.
- In Maharashtra he is worshipped Vitthala, in Pandharpur along with his wife Rukumani.
- Krishna is worshipped as Chennakeshava in Karnataka. In Kerala, he is visualised as Guruvayur.
- Vaishnava parampara in Bengal worships Flute holding Krishna standing along with Radha. It was popularized by Chaintanya Mahaprabhu.

- Krishna parampara in Assam under Shankaradev does not worships Radha. He was instrumental in inventing new types of music (Borgeet), theatrical performance (Ankia Naat, Bhaona), dance (Sattriya), all of which have Krishna and his life as important theme.
- In Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, the deity looks like the four armed Vishnu but is addressed as Govinda, or Gopala, the cowherd

## An odyssey of Indian temple architecture

### Context:

Devayatanam, a conference on temple architecture of India, at Hampi, Karnataka.

### About Devayatanam

- As a part of nation-wide Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav celebration, Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) organized a conference “Devāyatanam – an odyssey of Indian temple architecture” at Hampi (Karnataka).
- Purpose of the conference was to deliberate on philosophical, religious, social, economic, technical, scientific, art, and architectural aspects of temples.
- The chosen venue, Hampi served as the capital of the great medieval era empire of Vijayanagara for more than two centuries from 1336 to 1556 CE.



### Significance of Indian Temples

- Indian Temples are known worldwide for their magnificent architecture. These architectures exhibit India's rich history, culture, and heritage and are an integral part of Indian life and its ecosystem.

- Since time immemorial temples are perceived as the manifestation of Purush and Prakriti and are seen as the mirror of the cosmos. There are more than 2 million Hindu temples in the country.
- They have played an important role in legitimizing the political power of the royal family.
- They played a role in providing education to people
- They gave employment to people in the temple complex. Traditions like Devadasi system attained strong foothold in society.
- Temple construction was practiced as a pious act not only in the subcontinent but the idea also traveled to the nearest neighborhood such as south-east and East Asia. The art and technique of temple architecture spread from India to other regions and was modified, to suit the local requirements and also in turn inspired the development of new architectural styles.

## Story of Indian Temple Architecture

- The story includes great architectural marvels that have enriched the cultural landscape of India.
- Temple architecture as we see today with Garbagriha, Mandapa, Shikhara started with Gupta age, who started building temples with bricks. For example Dashavatara temple at Deogarh and Krishna temple at Bhitargaon. This is nagara style or North Indian style of Architecture.
- In South India Pallavas who emerged during the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD made their own personal contribution to Indian architecture. Their period is instrumental in transition from rock cut architecture to stone temples.
- Example rock cut temples at Mammallapuram and monolithic shrines known as Ratha temples. Kailashnath temple in Kanchipuram and Shore temple are quite famous. They pioneered Dravida style of Architecture. Gopurams became an important feature.
- Chalukyas built many structural temples. They propounded the vesara style of architecture. Their main centres of architecture were Aihole, Badami and Pattadakal. Example Virupaksha temple, Ravana phadi cave which is a rock cut temple, Ladkhana temple at Aihole
  - Greatest achievement of Rashtrakutas in architecture is the Kailashnath temple at Ellora. It is known for beautiful sculptures. Example Goddess Durga is shown as slaying the Buffalo demon. In another sculpture Ravana was making attempts to lift Mount Kailasa, the abode of Siva. Ellora, Ajantha and Elephanta are centres of their art.
  - The Chola period saw the culmination of Dravida temple art resulting in the most sophisticated buildings. The maturity and grandeur of Chola architecture found expression in the two magnificent temples of Thanjavur and Gangaikondacholapuram. They are a masterpiece constituting the high-water mark of South Indian architecture.
  - Temple architecture received a new impetus and reached to new heights under the patronage of the Vijayanagar rulers. The most important was the temple of Hazara Rama. The temples of Vithala and Pattabhirama also deserve mention

## Dholavira as source of Information about IVC

### Context:

Dholavira becomes 40th UNESCO site from India.

### About Harappan city of Dholavira

- Dholavira is an outstanding example of Harappan urban planning, with its preconceived city planning, multi-layered fortifications, sophisticated water reservoirs and drainage system, and the extensive use of stone as a building material.



- After Mohen-jo-Daro, Ganweriwala and Harappa in Pakistan and Rakhigarhi in Haryana of India, Dholavira is the fifth largest metropolis of IVC.

### **Dholavira's Answers about the IVC**

- Unlike graves at other IVC sites, no mortal remains of humans have been discovered at Dholavira. Memorials contain no bones or ashes but offerings of precious stones, etc, this gives new dimension to our knowledge of Harappans.
- Remains of a copper smelter indicate of Harappans, who lived in Dholavira, knew metallurgy.
- It was also a hub of manufacturing jewellery made of shells and semi-precious stones, like agate and used to export timber.
- Beads peculiar to the Harappan workmanship have been found in the royal graves of Mesopotamia, indicating Dholavira used to trade with the Mesopotamians.
- Its decline also coincided with the collapse of Mesopotamia, indicating the integration of economies. Harappans, who were maritime people, lost a huge market, affecting the local mining, manufacturing, marketing and export businesses once Mesopotamia fell.
- Archaeologists say that from 2000 BC, Dholavira entered a phase of severe aridity due to climate change and rivers like Saraswati drying up. Due to the drought people started migrating toward the Ganges valley or towards south Gujarat and further beyond in Maharashtra. The Great Rann of Kutch, which surrounds the Khadir island on which Dholavira is located, used to be navigable, but the sea receded gradually and the Rann became a mudflat.

### **Water Management System in Dholavira**

- An expansive water management system was in place to store every drop of water available shows the ingenuity of the people to survive against the rapid geo-climatic transformations.
- Water diverted from seasonal streams, scanty precipitation and available ground was sourced, stored, in large stone-cut reservoirs which are extant along the eastern and southern fortification.
- To further access water, few rock-cut wells, which date as one of the oldest examples, are evident in different parts of the city, the most impressive one being located in the citadel.
- Such elaborate water conservation methods of Dholavira is unique and measures as one of the most efficient systems of the ancient world.

## **Holding of religious events in Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites**

### **Context:**

Prayers were held at the ruins of the eighth-century Martand Sun Temple in Jammu and Kashmir.

### **About Martand Sun Temple**

- According to Kalhana's Rajatarangini — an account of the history of Kashmir between 1148 and 1149 — the Martand Sun Temple was commissioned in the 8th Century AD by Lalitaditya Muktapida. He was a powerful ruler of Kashmir's Karkota dynasty
- Temple was destroyed by Sikandar Shah Miri in the 14th century.
- Martand Sun Temple is said to have been an excellent specimen of Kashmiri architecture and one of the holiest shrines for the Kashmiri Pandits.

## Rules of Prayer in Ancient Monuments

- Rule 7(1) of the 1959 Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains, states that meetings, receptions, parties, entertainment or conferences cannot be held at a protected monument without permission in writing from the Union government.
- According to the rules, if a site was a functional place of worship when it came under the jurisdiction of ASI, then it would continue to be a place of worship.
- Rule 7(2) says this should not apply to any event held "in pursuance of a recognized religious usage or custom". Conduct of pooja is considered a violation of ASI norms as the Martand temple is considered a non-living monument.
- Of the 3,691 centrally-protected monuments and archaeological sites maintained by the ASI, a little less than a fourth (820) have places of worship, while the rest are considered non-living monuments where no new religious rituals can be started or conducted.

## Living Monuments

- Best-known example of a living ASI monument is the Taj Mahal in Agra, where namaz is held every Friday. But it is offered here for the last 400 years and this is not a new tradition.
- Other notable living monuments include the remains of an old Hindu temple inside the Dayaram Fort in Hathras, three mosques in Kannauj, Roman Catholic Church in Meerut, Nila Mosque in Delhi's Hauz Khas Village, Bajreshwari Devi Temple in Himachal Pradesh's Chamba, and several Buddhist monasteries in Ladakh.

## Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysala

### Context:

### Hoysala temples finalised as India's nomination for World Heritage site for 2022-23

### About Hoysala Temples

- The Hoysala temples of Belur, Halebid and Somnathapura in Karnataka have been selected as India's nomination for UNESCO's list of World Heritage sites
- Hoysala Temples are a testimony to the rich historical and cultural heritage of India
- Hoysaleswara temple, also called 'Halebidu' temple, is a 12th-century temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, the God of Destruction.
- It is said to be the largest monument in Halebidu, Karnataka and erstwhile capital of the Hoysala Empire.
- It was sponsored by King Vishnuvardhana.

### Architectural details of Hoysala Temples

- Hoysala architects used their profound knowledge of temple architecture in different parts of India. Art historians consider exceptional sculptural artistry of the Hoysala to be among the masterpieces of Asian art.
- These temples have a basic Dravidian style, but also show a strong influence of 'Bhumija', which is seen in central India, along with 'Nagara' traditions of northern and western India.

- Hoysala architects made considered and informed eclectic selections of features from other temple architecture style which further modified and then complemented with their own particular innovations. This resulted in the birth of a completely novel Hoysala temple form.
- Hoysaleswara temple follows the Shaivism tradition, but includes themes from Vaishnavism and Shaktism, too, along with images from Jainism. The sculptures inside the temple depict scenes from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata Purana

### Significance of World Heritage sites

- World Heritage Sites are designated by UNESCO for having cultural, historical, scientific or other forms of significance.
- As per an international treaty adopted by UNESCO in 1972 called the 'Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage', UNESCO seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world considered to be of outstanding value to humanity.
- They are selected according to The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention; a country must first list its significant cultural and natural sites into a document known as the Tentative List.
- The sites selected from that list move onto the Nomination File, which is then evaluated by the International Council on Monuments and Sites and the World Conservation Union

## Close connection between India and Southeast Asia

### Context:

Influence of Hinduism and Indian culture in Southeast Asia

### Tracing Common roots

- Influence of Hinduism and Indian culture in Southeast Asia is commonly understood as a result of conquest and trade.
- Campaigns of Rajendra Chola I, ruler of the Chola dynasty, based in modern Tamil Nadu, invaded the Indianized Indonesian state of Srivijaya (650–1377 CE) in 1025 CE.
- Tamil, rather than Malay power, predominated in maritime Southeast Asia for two centuries subsequent to this.
- For centuries Indian traders have carried out trade of exotic spices, tea, precious and semi-precious metals etc. with South East Asia. This led to exchange of many cultural traditions. It can be seen in influence of classical languages of India on SE Asian languages and scripts. Traditional dances, puppetry, name of places temples architectural style of temples, customs and traditions exhibit Indian culture.
- Adventures of Ram, Sita and Hanuman form a common theme in traditional dances and puppetry. Angkor Wat temple in Cambodia means " Abode of Vishnu"
- Various Indian Hindu festivals are celebrated with great pomp in Southeast Asian countries. For example, Diwali is one of the most celebrated festivals in Singapore.
- National symbol of Indonesia bears the symbol of Garuda, The eagle mount of the Hindu God Vishnu. National airline is known as 'Garuda Indonesia'
- Earliest connections between Indian dance and Southeast Asia were identified by Padma Subrahmanyam and Kapila Vatsyayan. They made the observation that the sculptural arts of Southeast Asia reflected a deep understanding of codes within the Natyashastra.

- This is reflected in the 9th century temple complex of Prambanan in Indonesia, where we find 62 dancing sculptures, labelled according to the postures given in the fourth chapter of the Natyashastra, titled 'Tandava Laksanam'. It is a kind of dance catalogue of sorts is the earliest of its kind, pre-dating the visual catalogues of dance that we find in Thanjavur, Chidambaram, Kumbakonam, and other sites across Tamil Nadu.
- Temple complexes at Angkor Wat have beautiful, intricate panels depicting scenes from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

## Conclusion

- Southeast Asia is one of the most influenced parts of world by India. Although India does not share borders directly with any of the Southeast Asian States except Myanmar, the influence that India has had on these countries through religions remains intact for thousands of years.

# Chariot Festivals in India

## Context:

Annual chariot festivals carrying processional deities are held in temples across India

## Significance of Chariot Festivals in India

- A chariot is a moving temple; it makes it possible for the infirm, the poor, and the aged to worship their favourite deities, not by visiting the deity at the temple, but by getting the darshan of the deities at their doorsteps.
- Also, a temple car being drawn by a huge number of devotees, who represent different strata of the society, signifies that everybody is equal before god.
- It is an age-old practice in India.
- There are references about the word 'car' (Ratha) in the Rig and Atharva Vedas, and that there is a mention of 'car festival' in the Shatapatha Brahmana, an important Sanskrit text.
- There are references about military and royal chariots in the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and other Tamil literary works.

## Different Chariot Festivals in India

- **The Tiruvuar chariot festival:** It is known for being one of the largest of its kind in Asia. Tiruvarur therottam', or the Azhi ther, as it is popularly called, is a historical event that is associated with the Tiruvarur Tyagarajaswamy temple. The 'Aazhi Ther' event is mentioned in the ancient Tamil epic Silappathikaram and also in the Thevaram hymns by the Saivite saints Appar, Sundarar, Manickavachagar, and Thirugnanasambandar.
- **The Srivilliputhur car festival:** The birth place of Andal Nachiyar, who composed the Tamil hymns, Thiruppavai, Srivilliputhur is well-known for its Aadi Pooram car festival.
- **Chithirai festival, Madurai:** It marks the celestial wedding of Goddess Meenakshi with Lord Sundareswarar.
- **Big temple, Thanjavur:** The Thanjavur Chariot festival is a historical event associated with the Big Temple, Thanjavur. A sea of devotees from in and around Thanjavur will pull the temple car (Thiru Ther) of Lord Brahadeeswarar temple, popularly known as Big Temple, through the main streets. This important temple event is part of the annual Chithirai festival celebrations.
- **Ther festival at Samayapuram:** Among the festivals held through the year at the temple, the Poo Chordhal, and the ther festival are considered significant.

## Conclusion

Besides the few listed above, there are many temples, both well-known and rare, across the state, where chariot festival is celebrated with devotional fervour. And each one is unique in its own way.

## Tirumurai: A peep into the Tamil Culture

### Context:

Tirumurai verses go beyond devotion and reflect on Tamil history, art and tradition

### Significance of Tirumurai

- Tirumurai form a very important part of the priceless legacy of ancient Tamil poetry.
- After the Sangam works, it is regarded as the next voluminous corpus. The 18,000 verses that it comprises are a valuable archive of not only the creative output of several Saiva saints but also of the various shrines they visited, their observations of life and the evolution of our language.
- They also provide us information about several other things, including flora and fauna.
- Tirumurai hymns also encapsulate the history of the Tamil land and tradition, the genesis and development of Tamil Isai, the growth and style of Tamil culture, the habits and lives of Tamil people — overall the features and specialities of the Tamil world.

### Saivite composers of Tirumurai

- It is a twelve-part compilation. This was a work in progress for over 600 years as it begins with the Thevaram — the hymns by Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar (the foremost of the 63 Tamil Saivite saints collectively known as the Nayanmar or Arupathumoovar).
- The first seven sections of the Tirumurai comprise the works by Sambandar, Appar and Sundarar. These were compiled in the 11th century by the scholar Nambiyandar Nambi.
- The eighth Tirumurai is dedicated to the creations of Manikkavachagar, whose timeline is still being debated upon.
- The ninth Tirumurai comprises the works of nine lesser-known poets of the time of King Raja Raja Chola I (r 992-1014 CE), collectively known as the Tiruvisaippa.
- The tenth section is dedicated to the Tirumantiram, the deeply philosophical and often esoteric work of Thirumular, a siddha.
- The eleventh is a perfect illustration of the blurring lines between the devotees and the Lord, for it includes one verse attributed to Shiva himself. Some of the others in this section are poets, including some of the Arupathumoovar. It also has ten songs by Nambiyandar Nambi.
- The last section is Sekkizhar's Periya Puranam, the hagiography of the Arupathumoovar written in the 12th century. Thus, in 600 years, Tamil Saivite religious poetry codified itself.

## Lepakshi temple: An architectural marvel of Vijaynagara Empire

### Context:

Veerabhadra Swami temple, got listed in the UNESCO's tentative list of world heritage sites in India for 2022

## Famous Features at Lepakshi

- The Lepakshi Nandi, locally popular as Lepakshi Basavanna, is a monolithic bull in sitting posture. It is marvellously sculpted six-metre tall Nandi wearing layers of bells and ornaments. Like the temple, it dates back to the 16th century.
- Veerabhadra Swami is situated atop the Kurmasailam (tortoise-shaped) hill; it is a glorious example of the much-celebrated Vijayanagara architecture.
- Long pillared halls and intricate carvings of yalis, flowers, trees, animals, yakshas and yakshis can be seen on each pillar.
- The hanging pillars at the Veerabhadraswami temple is one of the most eye catching feature of the temple. Another major attraction within the temple is the massive carving of a seven-headed serpent shielding a Shivalinga.



## Fresco paintings At Lepakshi

- Virabhadra temple has some exquisite and rare mural paintings of the Vijayanagara period. One important mural painting in its Manu Neeti Chola mural in the Natya mandapa. It depicts ruler who decides that his son should meet the same fate as the dead calf, the sentence is executed.
- Paintings are somewhat similar to the Ellora paintings in terms of the colour palette of brown, ochre, red, off-white and black, but the style is very different.
- The detailing of the jewellery, clothing, and hairstyle of the women are fascinating
- The unique elongated headgear of the men, including gods, is another eye-catching feature. (I see resemblances to Kalamkari work.)
- The central portion of the roof near the garbha griha has a mural of Veerabhadra, flanked by Virupanna and Veeranna worshipping him. Measuring 23 feet by 13 feet, it is said to be one of the largest murals in Asia.
- There are also representations of at least 14 avataras of Shiva, as well as scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

## Connection to Ramayana

- Every part of the temple, there are two layers of stories — one that links it to incidents in the Ramayana, and the other talks about life during the reign of the Vijayanagara kings.

- The name of the place itself is linked with the Ramayana. Legend has it that Jatayu fell at this spot after Ravana cut its wings when he tried to prevent Sita's abduction. Rama stumbled upon the bird when searching for Sita. After the injured bird narrated what had happened, Rama coaxed him to rise again, "le, pakshi" (rise, bird in Telugu).
- At the kalyana mantapam there is a slab with the image of Hanuman carved on it.

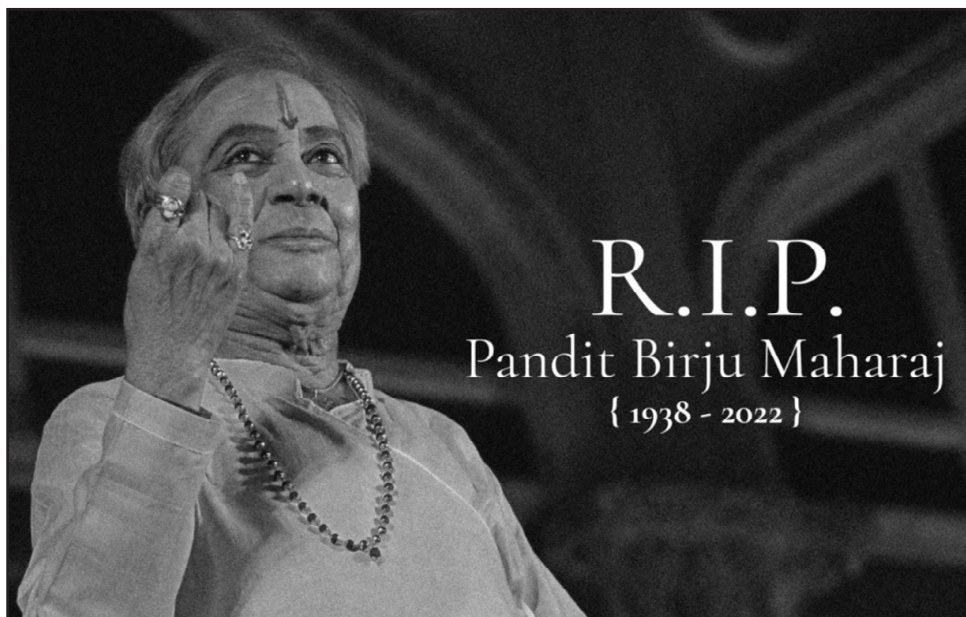
## Legend of Pt Birju Maharaj

### Context:

Kathak legend Pt Birju Maharaj Passed Away

### Background

- Kathak doyen Brij Mohan Nath Mishra, popularly known as Pandit Birju Maharaj was an exponent of the Kalka-Bindadin gharana of Lucknow and recipient of India's second highest civilian honour Padma Vibushan.
- Born in the house of Kathak exponent Jagannath Maharaj, better known as Acchan Maharaj, Birju Maharaj started performing from the age of seven. He trained under his father and guru Acchan Maharaj and uncles Shambhu Maharaj and Lachhu Maharaj.



### Contributions of Pt Birju Maharaj

- He belongs to a lineage that includes Kalka Maharaj and Bindadin Maharaj, hailed as the founders of modern Kathak. Kalka Prasad Maharaj was at the court of the Nawab of Awadh Wajid Ali Shah. Thus his dance underlined the Lucknow Kalka-Bindadin gharana features — ang (physical beauty), layakari (lyrical melody) and abhinaya (mime).
- Complex rhythmic structures, lightning-fast spins and poetic expressions were his greatest contributions. He has established a style that has restored the traditional glory of Kathak, yet established a strong connect with the contemporary world.
- The style is now followed by dancers across gharanas. A style that has put Kathak on the global map.

## Latest Excavations at Rakhigarhi

### Context:

How discoveries at Rakhigarhi shape our understanding of IVC

### Background

- The cultural span of the Harappan Civilisation can be broadly subdivided into three periods — early (3300 BC to 2600 BC), mature (2600 BC to 1900 BC), and late (1900 BC to 1700 BC)
- Five major urban sites — Mohenjo-daro, Harappa, Ganweriwala, all three sites now in Pakistan, and Rakhigarhi and Dholavira in India — have been identified as regional centres of the Harappan Civilisation.
- Rakhigarhi is also among the five iconic sites announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her Budget Speech in February 2020. The other sites are Hastinapur in Uttar Pradesh, Sivasagar in Assam, Dholavira in Gujarat and Adichanallur in Tamil Nadu.
- The site was first excavated by the ASI in 1998-2001. Later, Deccan College, Pune, excavated the site from 2013 to 2016. For the first time excavations have been done on Mound No. 3, which has revealed “an aristocratic settlement”

### Rakhigarhi as a source of Information about IVC

- Highlight among the findings is the jewellery-making unit/factory. Due to this finding, this settlement is being considered as a probable commercial trading centre in the ancient world.
- The structures and frameworks of tiered houses, a kitchen complex, lanes, a drainage system, graveyards, thousands of clay pots and seals, terracotta toys, statues and figures, as well as jewellery of copper, gold, agate and other semi-precious stones have also been found all over the site
- The two skeletons were found lying in a supine position with head pointing in the north direction. They were both buried with a plethora of pottery and adorned jewellery like jasper and agate beads and shell bangles.
- A symbolic miniature copper mirror was found buried along with one of the skeletons.
- According to historians Rakhigarhi site shows “layers of history”, ranging from the early Harappan to the mature Harappan period, but compared to the previous excavation, where town planning contours had emerged, in the current excavation, “detailed town planning patterns, street designs, including provision for soak pits” as part of a possible drainage system can be seen.

## Saint and Philosopher: Sri Ramanujacharya

### Context:

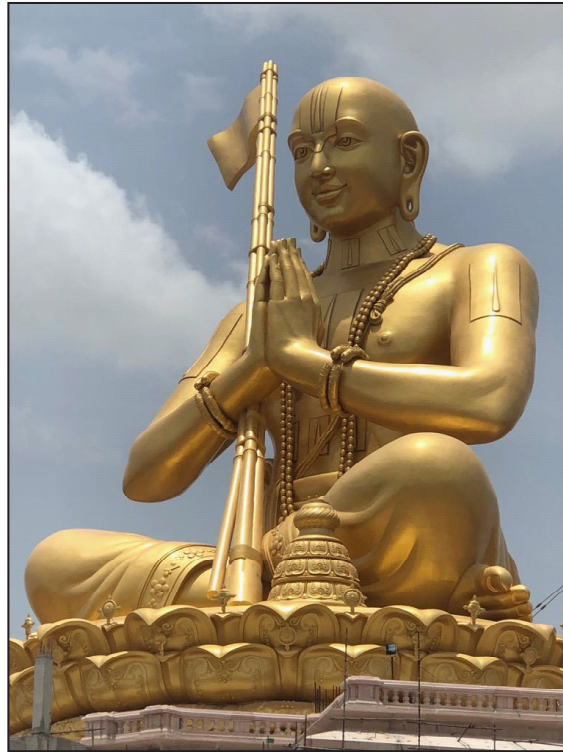
Statue of Equality, a gigantic statue of Ramanujacharya, unveiled in Hyderabad.

### Background

- Ramanujacharya was born in 1017 in Sriperumbudur in Tamil Nadu; he is revered as a Vedic philosopher and social reformer.
- Ramanuja revived the Bhakti movement, and his preachings inspired other Bhakti schools of thought.



- He is considered to be the inspiration for poets like Annamacharya, Bhakt Ramdas, Thyagaraja, Kabir, and Meerabai.
- He wrote nine scriptures known as the navaratnas, and composed numerous commentaries on Vedic scriptures and is credited with establishing the correct procedures for rituals performed in temples throughout India, the most famous being Tirumala and Srirangam.
- His major work was Vedartha Sangraha, Sri Bhashya, Bhagwat Gita Bhasya.



## Social Contribution of Sri Ramanujacharya

- Sri Ramanujacharya preached the spirit of equality and fought against all sorts of inequalities. He has also stressed the need of being in tune with nature and not to over-exploit it. He appealed for the protection of nature and its resources like air, water, and soil.
- He was an ardent advocate of social equality among all sections of people centuries ago, and encouraged temples to open their doors to everyone irrespective of caste or position in society at a time when people of many castes were forbidden from entering them.
- He took education to those who were deprived of it. His greatest contribution is the propagation of the concept of “**vasudhaiva kutumbakam**”, which translates as “all the universe is one family”.
- He travelled across India for several decades, propagating his ideas of social equality and universal brotherhood from temple podiums.
- He embraced the socially marginalised and condemned, and asked royal courts to treat them as equals.
- He spoke of universal salvation through devotion to God, compassion, humility, equality, and mutual respect, which is known as **Sri Vaishnavam Sampradaya**.

## Conclusion

Thus Ramanujacharya liberated millions from social, cultural, gender, educational, and economic discrimination with the foundational conviction that every human is equal regardless of nationality, gender, race, caste, or creed.

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