

3. Mahabalipuram's China Connection

Prelims: India and its Neighbours

Mains: GS-II- India and its neighbourhood- relations.

Why in News?

- ▶▶ Mahabalipuram or Mamallapuram where PM Modi will meet China's President Xi Jinping on October 11 & 12 in an informal Wuhan-style summit, had ancient links with Buddhism and China through the maritime outreach of the Pallava dynasty.

The Pallavas:

- ▶▶ The name Mamallapuram derives from Mamallan, or "great warrior", a title by which the Pallava King Narasimhavarman I (630-668 AD) was known.
- ▶▶ It was during his reign that Hiuen Tsang, the Chinese Buddhist monk-traveller, visited the Pallava capital at Kanchipuram.
- ▶▶ Narasimhavarman II (c.700-728 AD) aka Rajasimhan built on the work of earlier Pallava kings to consolidate maritime mercantile links with Southeast Asia.
- ▶▶ The Descent of the Ganga/Arjuna's Penance, a rock carving commissioned by Narasimhavarman I, with its depiction of the Bhagirathi flowing from the Himalayas, may serve as a reminder of the geography of India-China relations, and their shared resources.
- ▶▶ Tamil-Chinese links continued after the Pallavas, flourishing under the Cholas as the Coromandel coast became the entrepot between China and the Middle East.

Overseas Mission:

- ▶▶ He sent a mission to the Tang court in 720 with a request that would seem unusual in the context of India-China relations today. The emissaries of the Pallava king sought the permission of Emperor Xuangzong to fight back Arab and Tibetan intrusions in South Asia. Pleased with the Indian king's offer to form a coalition against the Arabs and Tibetans, the Chinese emperor bestowed the title of 'huaide jun' (the Army that Cherishes Virtue) to Narayansimha II's troops.
- ▶▶ The offer of help by the Pallava ruler, Sen noted, may have had more to do with furthering trade and for the prestige of association with the Chinese emperor, rather than any real prospect of helping him to fight off enemies in the faraway north.

Continuing Connections:

- ▶▶ In later centuries, the Coromandel coast retained its importance for trade between China and the west.

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- ▶▶ In the 17th and 18th centuries, it was a staging post for the Dutch, French and British for control of the seas between South Asia and SE Asia, as the Europeans fought to protect their trade routes with China and other countries in the region.
 - ▶▶ The ancient port city of Pondicherry, 80 km south of Mahabalipuram, was a French colony famous for its Chinese exports known as “Coromandel goods”, including crepe de chine.
 - ▶▶ Today the UT, with its French legacy, Tamil residents, Bengali and international devotees of Sri Aurobindo, is among the most diverse and cosmopolitan of cities in South India.

