

5. Chilika Lake

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.

How it was formed?

- 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.

Historical evidences:

- Greek geographer **Claudius Ptolemy** (150 CE) described Palur as an important port of Kalinga and referred to it as '**Paloura**' (located near Chilika).
- Chinese pilgrim **Xuanzang** (7th century CE) recorded '**Che-li-ta-lo-Ching**' as a flourishing port. This port was located at Chhatargarh on the banks of the Chilika.
- The **Brahmāda Purāna** (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**'.

About Chilika:

- 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.
- Chilika is **Asia's largest and world's second largest lagoon**.
- It is **the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian sub-continent** and is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals.
- In 1981, Chilika Lake was designated **the first Indian wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention**.
- Major attraction at Chilika is **Irrawaddy dolphins** which are often spotted off Satpada Island.
- The large **Nalabana Island** (Forest of Reeds) covering about 16 sq km in the lagoon area was declared a bird sanctuary in 1987.
- **Kalijai Temple** - Located on an island in the Chilika Lake.

6. Mahendragiri Biosphere Reserve

The Odisha government has proposed **a second biosphere reserve in the southern part of the state at Mahendragiri**, a hill ecosystem having rich biodiversity.

- The 5,569-square kilometre **Similipal Biosphere Reserve is Odisha's first such reserve** and was notified May 20, 1996.

About the proposed Mahendragiri Biosphere Reserve:

- It is around 470,955 hectares and is spread over Gajapati and Ganjam districts in the Eastern Ghats.
- The hill ecosystem acts as a transitional zone between the flora and fauna of southern India and the Himalayas, making the region an ecological estuary of genetic diversities.
- Mahendragiri is inhabited by the Soura people, a particularly vulnerable tribal group as well as the Kandha tribe.