



ART & CULTURAL HERITAGE OF INDIA

for UPSC and Civil Services Examinations

A Comprehensive Study Material for
2026 Main Examination

FIRST EDITION

2026

AUTHORED BY

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CHENNAI



EXAM FOCUSED
CONTENT



ANALYTICAL
APPROACH



YOUR SUCCESS
OUR MISSION

Art & Cultural Heritage of India
for
UPSC and Civil Services Examinations

For - 2026

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Preface

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination demands a nuanced, multidisciplinary understanding of India's past and its evolving socio-cultural landscape. As aspirants prepare for the **2026 Civil Services Main Examination**, balancing profound historical roots with contemporary developments is paramount.

This text is meticulously curated to bridge ancient traditions with modern academic and administrative realities. It serves as an intensive, comprehensive guide structured to streamline your preparation for **General Studies Paper I (Art & Culture)**.

How to Use This Book

This book is organized into **nine distinct thematic sections**, mapping out India's tangible and intangible heritage. To optimize your revision, keep the following core themes in mind as you progress through each section:

- Section A: Heritage, Temples & Architecture

Focus on structural evolutions, patron dynasties, and engineering principles. Pay close attention to the restoration of the *Hanamkonda Thousand Pillar Temple* via ancient sandbox technology and the newly excavated maritime/industrial layers at *Elephanta Island*.

- Section B: Buddhism & Archaeological Heritage

Trace the philosophical transformations across Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana sects. Key highlights include the *Zehanpora* Kushan-era site along the Silk Route and the inclusion of Odisha's *Buddhist Diamond Triangle* on the UNESCO Tentative List.

- Section C: Scripts, Languages & Literature

Analyze epigraphic milestones and linguistic rights. Study the global commercial reach shown by *Tamil Brahmi* inscriptions in Egypt, alongside the centenary and constitutional significance of the Santhali *Ol Chiki* script.

- Section D: Social Reform & Historical Movements

Examine the intersection of civil rights, constitutional provisions (Articles 15 and 17), and anti-caste struggles through the lens of the *Mahad Satyagraha centenary*.

- Section E: Folk Dances, Festivals & Performing Arts

Observe the ecological relationship between tribal arts and agrarian cycles, prominently featured via the Bodo community's *Bagurumba* dance and regional harvest festivals.

- Section F: Tribal Culture & Indigenous Heritage

Study India's major Scheduled Tribes, their socio-economic structures (such as the matrilineal system of the *Garo*), and living archaeological heritage like *Jharkhand's megaliths*.

- Section G: Traditional Arts, Crafts & Paintings

Master the technical nuances of indigenous artistry, from the lost-wax casting of *Chola Bronzes* to the natural earth pigments used in *Sohrai tribal wall paintings*.

- Section H: Geographical Indications & Cultural Economy

Understand the administrative and economic aspects of protecting traditional knowledge globally through the *Bharat GI Initiative*.

- Section I: Philosophy & Religious Thought

Deconstruct orthodox philosophical schools, focusing on *Jagadguru Madhvacharya's Dvaita Vedanta* and its lasting impact on the Bhakti movement.

Core Analytical Approach for the Main Exam

To secure high marks in the Main Examination, avoid treating art and culture as mere factual memorization. Instead, develop an analytical mindset that links historical heritage to contemporary administrative themes:

1. The Technology-Heritage Nexus: Look for intersections between ancient engineering and modern preservation (e.g., sandbox technology or the *Adi Vaani* digital translation platform). **2. The Cultural Economy:** Analyze how cultural heritage drives economic growth, tourism circuits, and soft power (e.g., the *Bharat GI Initiative* and the *Northeast Buddhist Circuit*). **3. Constitutional Integration:** Connect historical social reforms directly

to constitutional rights, tracing how grassroots movements shaped fundamental guarantees of equality and dignity.

This textbook provides the factual accuracy, structured presentation, and analytical depth needed to convert complex historical themes into impactful answers on exam day. May your analytical reading of these pages pave the way for your success.

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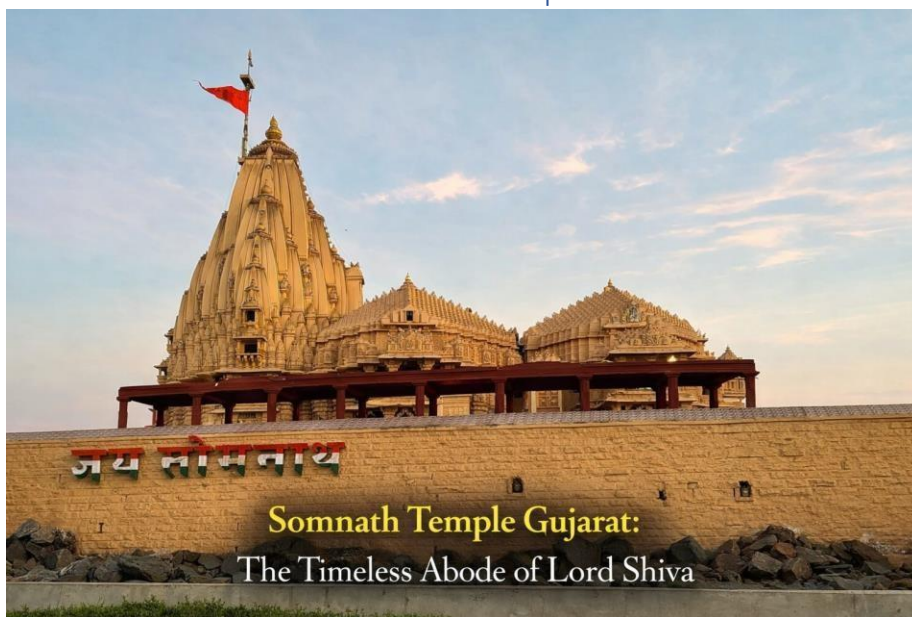
Section A: Heritage, Temples & Architecture

I. Somnath Swabhiman Parv:

Commemorating a Millennium of Resilience

Somnath Swabhiman Parv marks 1,000 years since the first invasion of the Somnath Temple by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1026 CE. The occasion symbolizes the enduring cultural, spiritual, and historical significance of the temple despite repeated attacks and destruction over centuries.

1. Somnath Temple:



Location and Religious Importance

The Somnath Temple is situated at Prabhas Patan near Veraval in Gujarat. The region has been a revered pilgrimage center since ancient times due to the presence of the Triveni Sangam, where the rivers Kapila, Hiran, and Sarasvati are believed to converge.

Significance as a Jyotirlinga

The temple is regarded as the foremost among the twelve sacred Jyotirlingas dedicated to Lord Shiva, making it one of Hinduism's most important places of worship.

2. Architectural Features of the Temple Maru-

Gurjara Style

The existing structure showcases the Maru-Gurjara architectural tradition, also known as the Solanki or Chalukya style, which flourished in western India.

Structural Components

The temple follows the "Kailash Mahameru Prasad" design and consists of:

- **Garbhagriha** – the sanctum housing the deity.
- **Sabhamandap** – the hall used for religious gatherings.
- **Nrityamandap** – the hall designated for cultural and devotional performances.

Tower and Summit

A towering shikhara rises approximately 150 feet above the temple, crowned by a massive kalash weighing around ten tonnes.

3. Historical References to Somnath

Ancient Literary Evidence

The renowned Sanskrit poet **Kalidasa** referred to Somnath-Prabhasa as an important Shaivite pilgrimage destination in his work *Raghuvamsa* during the 5th century CE.

Medieval Accounts

Several medieval scholars and chroniclers documented the temple's prominence:

- **Al-Biruni**, in *Kitab-ul-Hind*, described the grandeur and significance of Somnath during the 11th century.
- **Amir Khusrau**, in *Khazain-ul-Futuh*, recorded the destruction caused by Alauddin Khilji's forces in the late 13th century.

4. Repeated Invasions and Destruction

Mahmud of Ghazni's Raid

In 1026 CE, during the reign of King Bhima I, Mahmud of Ghazni attacked the temple, looted its wealth, and damaged the sacred Jyotirlinga.

Subsequent Attacks

The temple faced further destruction on several occasions, notably in:

- 1297 CE
- 1394 CE
- 1706 CE under the orders of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb

Historical records suggest that the temple was plundered numerous times, with some accounts placing the number of attacks as high as seventeen.

5. Reconstruction and Revival

Ahilyabai Holkar's Contribution

In the late 18th century, around 1783 CE, **Ahilyabai Holkar** undertook the reconstruction of the temple, restoring its religious significance.

Post-Independence Reconstruction

After India's independence, **Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel** initiated the rebuilding of Somnath in 1947 as a symbol of national pride and cultural revival.

Consecration Ceremony

The reconstructed temple was formally consecrated on 11 May 1951 by **Rajendra Prasad**, marking the completion of a significant chapter in the temple's history.

Maru-Gurjara Architecture (Solanki Style)

1. Origin and Development

The Maru-Gurjara style emerged around the 6th century CE in the regions historically known as:

- **Marudesh** (present-day Rajasthan)
- **Gurjaratra** (present-day Gujarat)

The architectural tradition attained its highest level of refinement during the rule of the Solanki (Chalukya) dynasty in Gujarat.

2. Distinctive Features

Jharokha

A projecting stone window or balcony supported by decorative brackets, commonly used for ventilation, observation, and aesthetic appeal.

Chhatra

A dome-shaped pavilion resembling an umbrella, often constructed as a commemorative or memorial structure.

Haveli

Large residential mansions belonging to wealthy families or nobility, generally organized around a central courtyard.

Importance of Courtyards

The courtyard served multiple purposes:

- Enhanced natural lighting.
- Improved air circulation.
- Created a gradual transition between public and private spaces.
- Helped regulate indoor temperatures.

Jaali

Intricately carved perforated stone screens featuring geometric, floral, or calligraphic patterns, allowing airflow while maintaining privacy.

Baoli (Stepwell)

Architecturally elaborate water reservoirs accessed through descending flights of steps, designed for groundwater conservation and community use.

Johad

Traditional rainwater-harvesting structures, typically consisting of earthen embankments or small barriers built across slopes to capture runoff and recharge groundwater resources.

2. Bhadrakali Inscription:



A Key Source for the History of Somnath Temple

The Bhadrakali Inscription is an important epigraphic document from the 12th century that provides valuable insights into the history, reconstruction, and patronage of the Somnath Temple during the Solanki period. It serves as a significant historical source for understanding the temple's evolution and religious prominence.

1. Location and Historical Setting

- The inscription is located at **Prabhas Patan** in present-day Gujarat.
- Dated to **1169 CE**, it is engraved on the wall of the ancient Bhadrakali Temple.
- It stands as an important archaeological and historical record associated with the Somnath region.

2. Nature and Purpose of the Inscription

Prashasti Tradition

- The inscription is composed in the form of a **prashasti** (eulogistic inscription).

- It praises **Bhavabrihaspati**, who served as the religious guide and spiritual advisor to **Kumarapala** of the Solanki (Chaulukya) dynasty.
- The text highlights his contributions to religious and temple-related activities.

3. Account of the Somnath Temple Through the Four Yugas Legendary

Narrative

The inscription presents a traditional account of the Somnath Temple's existence across the four cosmic ages (Yugas):

- In the **Satya Yuga**, the temple is said to have been constructed in **gold**.
- In the **Treta Yuga**, it was rebuilt in **silver**.
- In the **Dvapara Yuga**, it was fashioned from **wood**.
- In the **Kali Yuga**, the temple was reconstructed in **stone**, attributed to **Bhimdev Solanki**.

This narrative symbolizes the temple's enduring sanctity and continuity through different eras.

4. Evidence of Solanki Patronage

Revival and Renovation Efforts

- The inscription underscores the significant role played by the **Solanki dynasty** in preserving and restoring the Somnath Temple.
- Particular emphasis is placed on the efforts of **Kumarapala**, who supported the temple's revival during the 12th century.
- It reflects the dynasty's commitment to promoting religious institutions and safeguarding cultural heritage.

5. Historical Significance

The Bhadrakali Inscription is regarded as an important source for:

- Reconstructing the historical development of the Somnath Temple.
- Understanding the religious and cultural policies of the Solanki rulers.
- Studying medieval temple patronage and architectural traditions in western India.
- Preserving legends and traditions associated with one of India's most revered pilgrimage sites.

3. Hanamkonda's Thousand Pillar Temple:



A Masterpiece of Kakatiya Heritage

Recently, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** completed the restoration of the 12th-century **Kalyana Mandapam (Dance Pavilion)** at the Thousand Pillar Temple in Hanamkonda, Telangana. The restoration project, which lasted 42 years, revived a structure that had sunk due to foundation failure. The reconstruction was carried out using the traditional **Kakatiya-era sandbox technology**, an ancient engineering technique known for its durability and earthquake resistance.

Thousand Pillar Temple

About the Thousand Pillar Temple

What is the Temple?

The Thousand Pillar Temple is one of the most famous monuments of the Kakatiya period and an important pilgrimage destination. It is a **Trikutalaya**, meaning a temple with three sanctums dedicated to:

- Lord Shiva
- Lord Vishnu
- Surya (the Sun God)

Location

The temple is located in **Hanamkonda**, which forms part of **Warangal**. **Builder**

The temple was constructed in **1163 CE** by **Rudra Deva**, one of the prominent rulers of the Kakatiya dynasty.

Architectural Features Chalukyan and

Kakatiya Style

The temple reflects the influence of the Chalukyan architectural tradition while showcasing the artistic excellence of the Kakatiya craftsmen through detailed carvings and stonework.

Star-Shaped Design

One of the most striking features of the temple is its star-shaped platform and layout. This unique design highlights the advanced engineering and architectural skills of medieval South Indian builders.

Monolithic Nandi

The temple houses a magnificent Nandi statue carved from a single block of black basalt stone. The sculpture has recently undergone restoration, bringing back several damaged portions.

Intricately Carved Pillars

The temple derives its name from its numerous beautifully sculpted pillars. The carvings on these pillars create the visual impression of countless columns, demonstrating exceptional craftsmanship.

Historical Significance

During the invasion led by **Ulugh Khan** in 1323–24 CE, parts of the temple, including the dance pavilion, were damaged. The pavilion remained in ruins for centuries before its recent restoration.

4. Elephanta Island:



2.

A Historic Centre of Art, Religion, and Maritime Trade

Recently, the **Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)** discovered a 1,500-year-old T-shaped stepped reservoir on Elephanta Island. This finding highlights the advanced water-management techniques used by ancient inhabitants and provides new insights into the island's historical importance.

Elephanta Island

What is Elephanta Island?

Elephanta Island is a famous island located in Mumbai Harbour. It is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** renowned for its magnificent rock-cut cave temples.

The island is best known for its caves dedicated to **Shiva**, which showcase some of the

finest examples of Indian rock-cut architecture and sculpture.

Local Name

Before it came to be known as Elephanta, the island was called **Gharapuri**, meaning "City of Caves."

Origin of the Name "Elephanta"

Portuguese Influence

During the 16th century, Portuguese explorers arrived on the island and discovered a large stone elephant sculpture near the landing area.

Impressed by this monolithic statue, they named the island **Elephanta**. Although the original elephant statue was later relocated, the name has remained in use ever since.

Dynasties Associated with Elephanta Island

Over the centuries, several ruling dynasties contributed to the island's development and preservation.

Kalachuri Dynasty

- Archaeological evidence suggests that the **Kalachuri Dynasty** was the principal patron of the main cave temples during the 6th century CE.
- Coins discovered on the island, including those of **Krishnaraja**, support this conclusion.

Konkan Mauryas

- Historical records indicate that the **Konkan Mauryas** ruled the region before the Kalachuris.

Chalukyas and Rashtrakutas

- The **Chalukya Dynasty** and the **Rashtrakuta Dynasty** later maintained the island's religious and strategic significance.

Colonial Period

- The island subsequently came under Portuguese and British control, who used it for military and administrative purposes.

Major Features of Elephanta Island

Main Cave (Cave 1)

The most impressive structure on the island is Cave 1, a vast rock-cut temple complex covering nearly 60,000 square feet.

It contains:

- Large halls
- Massive pillars
- Sacred shrines
- Intricately carved sculptures

Trimurti (Sadashiva)



Iconic Sculpture

The most celebrated artwork on the island is the **Trimurti (Sadashiva)** sculpture.

- It stands about 20 feet high.
- It portrays Shiva in three forms:
 - Creator
 - Preserver
 - Destroyer

This masterpiece is considered one of the greatest achievements of Indian sculpture.

Other Important Sculptures

Gangadhara Panel

This relief depicts the descent of the sacred River Ganga from heaven to earth through Shiva's intervention.

Ardhanarishvara

The sculpture represents the combined form of Shiva and Parvati, symbolizing the unity of masculine and feminine energies.

Geological Features Basalt

Rock Formation

The caves have been carved directly from solid basalt rock, which is part of the extensive **Deccan Traps**.

The durability of basalt has helped preserve the caves for many centuries.

Religious Importance

Shaivite Centre

The island primarily served as a major centre of Shiva worship.

Buddhist Presence

Apart from Hindu monuments, smaller Buddhist remains and stupas have also been found on the island.

This indicates that different religious traditions coexisted and interacted in the region.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries (2025–26) Ancient

Stepped Reservoir

One of the most significant discoveries is a large T-shaped stepped reservoir.

Features

- Approximately 14.7 metres long.
- Built using stone blocks brought from the mainland.
- Designed to collect and store rainwater.

Purpose

The reservoir helped address the island's rocky terrain and limited freshwater availability by conserving monsoon water.

Evidence of Industrial Activity

Archaeologists discovered:

- A dyeing vat used for textile processing.
- Large storage containers.

These findings suggest that Elephanta was not only a religious centre but also an important industrial and commercial settlement.

International Trade Connections

Excavations have uncovered more than 3,000 pottery fragments, including:

- Mediterranean amphorae
- West Asian torpedo jars

These artefacts indicate active maritime trade with regions such as:

- Roman Empire
- Mesopotamia

The discoveries reveal Elephanta's role in ancient international trade networks.

Coin Discoveries

Around 60 ancient coins have been recovered from the site.

Historical Significance

- The collection includes silver and copper coins.
- Several coins belong to **Krishnaraja**.
- These findings help date the island's peak phase of activity to the 6th century CE.

Significance of Elephanta Island

Elephanta Island is important because it:

- Preserves some of India's finest rock-cut architecture.
- Demonstrates the artistic excellence of ancient sculptors.
- Reflects the religious diversity of early India.
- Provides evidence of sophisticated water-management systems.
- Reveals ancient trade links with distant civilizations.
- Serves as a valuable source for understanding India's cultural and maritime history.

5. Amaravati:

The Permanent Capital of Andhra Pradesh

Recently, the President of India gave assent to the **Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill, 2026**, officially declaring **Amaravati** as the sole and permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh. This decision brings clarity to the state's capital status and strengthens Amaravati's role as the administrative, legislative, and judicial centre of the state.

Amaravati



About Amaravati

What is Amaravati?

Amaravati is a planned city located on the banks of the **Krishna River**. It serves as the administrative, legislative, and judicial capital of Andhra Pradesh.

The city has been envisioned as a modern "People's Capital" that combines advanced urban development with a rich historical and cultural legacy.

Location Geographic

Setting

Amaravati is situated in **Guntur District** on the southern bank of the Krishna River.

Strategic Position

- Located between the major cities of **Vijayawada** and **Guntur**.
- Well-connected by road, rail, and other transport networks.
- Positioned in a region with significant economic and agricultural importance.

Development of the Modern Capital Formation

After State Bifurcation

In 2014, Andhra Pradesh was reorganized following the creation of **Telangana**. As a result, Andhra Pradesh needed a new capital city.

Foundation of the New City

- The foundation stone of modern Amaravati was laid on **22 October 2015** at **Uddandarayunipalem**.
- The city was named after the ancient Amaravati, reflecting the region's historical significance and cultural identity.

Historical Importance of Amaravati

Amaravati has a history spanning more than two thousand years and has been an important centre of political, religious, and commercial activity.

Capital of the Satavahana Dynasty

Amaravati served as an important centre during the rule of the **Satavahana Dynasty**, which governed large parts of central and southern India between the 2nd century BCE and the 3rd century CE.

The Satavahanas played a significant role in promoting trade, culture, and Buddhism.

Centre of Buddhist Learning Amaravati

Stupa



Amaravati emerged as one of the most important centres of Buddhism in ancient India.

- The **Amaravati Stupa**, also known as the Mahachaitya, was among the largest Buddhist stupas in the country.
- The monument was famous for its intricate limestone carvings.

Amaravati School of Art

The decorative sculptures of the stupa gave rise to the renowned **Amaravati School of Art**, known for its elegance and detailed craftsmanship.

Ancient Trade Centre

Archaeological discoveries, including Roman coins and trade-related artefacts, indicate that Amaravati was an important commercial hub.

International Connections

The city maintained trade links with:

- Roman Empire
- Southeast Asian regions

These connections contributed to its prosperity and cultural exchange.

Religious Significance

Amareswara Temple

Amaravati is home to the **Amareswara Temple**, one of the five sacred **Pancharama Kshetrams** dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Religious Diversity

Historically, the region has been associated with multiple faiths, including:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Jainism

This rich religious heritage has earned Amaravati a reputation as a centre of cultural and spiritual harmony.

Visit of Xuanzang

The famous Chinese Buddhist traveller **Xuanzang** visited the region around 639 CE.

In his writings, he described:

- Magnificent monasteries
- Flourishing Buddhist institutions
- A vibrant religious and intellectual environment

His accounts provide valuable historical information about ancient Amaravati.

Importance of Amaravati as the Capital

Administrative Stability

The 2026 amendment officially confirms Amaravati as the permanent capital of Andhra Pradesh.

This ensures that the three pillars of government operate from a single location:

- Executive
- Legislature
- Judiciary

Such an arrangement can improve administrative coordination and governance.

Planned Greenfield City

Amaravati is being developed as a modern greenfield capital city with an emphasis on:

- Sustainable urban planning
- Smart infrastructure
- Environmental conservation

Economic Potential

Due to its strategic location along the Krishna River, the city has the potential to become a major centre for:

- Information Technology (IT)
- Pharmaceutical industries

- Logistics and trade
- Blue economy-related activities

Cultural Revival

The development of Amaravati is also viewed as a revival of the historical and cultural legacy of the Telugu-speaking region.

By drawing inspiration from its ancient heritage, the city aims to serve as a symbol of progress while preserving its rich historical identity.

6. Ellora Caves:



A Masterpiece of India's Rock-Cut Heritage

Context: Historians and heritage experts have emphasized the need to promote lesser-known historical monuments located around the Ellora Caves, including the tomb of Malik Ambar, the resting place of the first Peshwa, and the symbolic tomb of the last Ottoman Caliph.

Introduction to Ellora Caves What Are

the Ellora Caves?

The **Ellora Caves** are among India's most remarkable archaeological monuments. This vast complex consists of 34 rock-cut caves that served as temples, monasteries, and places of worship for followers of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism.

Recognized for their artistic brilliance and architectural excellence, the caves are listed as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** and represent one of the largest rock-cut cave complexes in the world.

Location

Where Are the Ellora Caves Situated?

The caves are located near **Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar** (formerly Aurangabad) in Maharashtra. The site attracts visitors, pilgrims, historians, and researchers from across the globe.

Historical Development Construction Over

Several Centuries

The caves were created over a long period, roughly between the 6th and 10th centuries CE. Different religious communities contributed to their development, resulting in a unique blend of architectural styles and spiritual traditions.

Buddhist Caves (Caves 1–12)

- Built primarily between the 5th and 7th centuries CE.
- Served as monasteries, prayer halls, and meditation centers.
- Contain residential cells for monks and beautifully carved chaitya halls.

Hindu Caves (Caves 13–29)

- Constructed mainly during the rule of the **Rashtrakuta Dynasty**.
- Feature grand sculptures, massive pillars, and detailed depictions of Hindu mythology.
- Include the famous Kailasa Temple.

Jain Caves (Caves 30–34)

- Created between the 9th and 10th centuries CE.
- Known for their delicate carvings, elegant pillars, and themes emphasizing simplicity and spiritual discipline.

Architectural Highlights

Kailasa Temple: The Crown Jewel of Ellora



A Monument Carved from a Single Rock

The **Kailasa Temple** (Cave 16) is considered one of the greatest achievements of ancient Indian engineering.

Unique Features

- Entirely carved from a single rock mass.
- Excavated from top to bottom rather than built block by block.
- Dedicated to Lord Shiva.
- Designed in the form of a magnificent temple complex.

Remarkable Sculptures

The temple contains numerous artistic masterpieces, including:

- Nandi Mandapa (shrine of Nandi)
- Life-sized stone elephants
- Depictions of Ravana attempting to lift Mount Kailasa
- Narasimha destroying the demon Hiranyakashipu

Symbol of Religious Harmony

Coexistence of Three Faiths

One of Ellora's most remarkable aspects is the presence of Buddhist, Hindu, and Jain monuments within a single complex.

This reflects centuries of cultural interaction, mutual respect, and artistic collaboration among different religious communities.

Section B :

Buddhism & Archaeological Heritage

7. Zehanpora Site:



A Window into Kashmir's Buddhist Heritage

The recent discovery of ancient stupas at Zehanpora highlights Kashmir's important place in the spread of Buddhism and its historical connection with the Gandhara cultural tradition. The findings provide valuable evidence of the region's role as a centre of religious learning, trade, and cultural exchange.

1. Location and Historical Context

- The Zehanpora archaeological site is located in **Baramulla** in North Kashmir.
- The site lies along the historic trade corridor that formed part of the ancient **Silk Route**, connecting Kashmir with regions such as Kandahar and Central Asia.
- Its strategic location facilitated the movement of merchants, pilgrims, and scholars, contributing to the spread of Buddhism.

2. Discovery of Stupas

Kushan-Era Structures

- Archaeological excavations have uncovered several stupas dating back to the **Kushan Empire** period (1st–3rd century CE).
- These structures serve as evidence of the flourishing Buddhist presence in Kashmir during the Kushan age.

3. Other Archaeological Findings

Excavations at the site have revealed a variety of artefacts and structural remains, including:

- Remnants of wooden superstructures associated with religious buildings.
- Evidence of an urban settlement complex, which may have included **chaityas** (prayer halls) and **viharas** (Buddhist monasteries).
- Pottery belonging to the Kushan period.
- Copper objects and other material remains that offer insights into the socio-economic life of the region.

4. Historical Significance

The discoveries at Zehanpora are important because they:

- Demonstrate Kashmir's strong links with the Gandhara Buddhist tradition.
- Highlight the region's role as a centre of Buddhist learning and worship.
- Provide evidence of cultural interactions along the Silk Route.
- Enhance understanding of urban and religious development during the Kushan era.

8. Tathagata Buddha:



Meaning, Five Wisdom Buddhas, and Spiritual Significance

Recently, the sacred **Piprahwa Relics of Tathagata Buddha** were brought to **Leh** for a special public exhibition beginning on **Buddha Purnima 2026**. The event holds great spiritual importance for Buddhist devotees and admirers around the world.

Tathagata Buddha

What Does "Tathagata" Mean?

Meaning of the Term

The word **Tathagata** is a revered title used for **Gautama Buddha** in Buddhist scriptures. It is commonly interpreted as:

- "One who has thus come"
- "One who has thus gone"

The title signifies a fully enlightened being who has transcended worldly attachments and broken free from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Importance in Buddhism

The term reflects the Buddha's attainment of ultimate truth and spiritual perfection. It emphasizes wisdom, compassion, and liberation from suffering.

The Five Tathagatas (Five Wisdom Buddhas)

In **Mahayana** and **Vajrayana Buddhism**, the Five Tathagatas symbolize different aspects of enlightened wisdom. Together, they form a sacred mandala representing spiritual harmony and completeness.

Buddha	Wisdom Represented	Color	Direction	Symbolic Gesture (Mudra)
Vairocana	Wisdom of Ultimate Reality	White	Center	Dharmachakra Mudra (Teaching)
Akshobhya	Mirror-like Wisdom	Blue	East	Bhumisparsha Mudra (Earth-Touching)
Ratnasambhava	Wisdom of Equality	Yellow	South	Varada Mudra (Giving)
Amitabha	Discriminating Wisdom and Compassion	Red	West	Dhyana Mudra (Meditation)
Amoghasiddhi	All-Accomplishing Wisdom	Green	North	Abhaya Mudra (Fearlessness)

Key Characteristics of the Five Tathagatas Transformation of

Human Emotions

Each Wisdom Buddha represents the transformation of negative emotions into positive wisdom.

Examples

- **Akshobhya** transforms anger and hatred into clear understanding and insight.
- **Amitabha** converts attachment and desire into compassion and selfless love.
- **Ratnasambhava** transforms pride into wisdom based on equality and respect

- for all beings.

This symbolism teaches practitioners how to overcome mental obstacles on the path to enlightenment.

Central Position of Vairocana

Among the Five Tathagatas, **Vairocana** occupies the central position.

- He symbolizes ultimate truth and universal consciousness.
- The other four Buddhas are viewed as manifestations of different aspects of this supreme wisdom.

Associated Symbols

Each Tathagata is linked with symbolic objects that represent spiritual qualities.

Examples

- **Akshobhya** is associated with the **Vajra**, symbolizing strength and indestructible wisdom.
- **Ratnasambhava** is connected with the **Jewel**, representing spiritual wealth and generosity.

Directional Significance

The Five Tathagatas are also connected with specific directions.

- **Amitabha** is associated with the West and the Pure Land known as **Sukhavati**.
- This direction symbolizes spiritual rebirth and enlightenment.

Spiritual Importance of the Five Tathagatas Role in

Meditation

Buddhist practitioners meditate upon the Five Tathagatas to cultivate:

- Wisdom
- Compassion
- Fearlessness

- Generosity
- Mental clarity

The practice helps individuals transform negative tendencies into positive qualities.

Guide for Personal Development

The Five Wisdom Buddhas serve as a spiritual framework for understanding the human mind and achieving inner balance.

Significance of the Piprahwa Relics Sacred

Buddhist Heritage

The **Piprahwa Stupa** relics are among the most revered Buddhist treasures associated with the Buddha.

Global Symbol of Devotion

These relics have been displayed in several countries, including:

- Thailand
- Sri Lanka
- Singapore
- Russia

Such exhibitions help strengthen cultural and spiritual ties among Buddhist communities worldwide.

9. Buddhist Heritage Circuit in Northeast India:

Promoting Culture, Tourism, and Regional Development

In the **Union Budget 2026–27**, the Government of India announced a new initiative to develop a **Buddhist Heritage Circuit in Northeast India**. The scheme aims to preserve ancient monasteries and temples, improve tourism infrastructure, and strengthen the cultural and economic development of the region.

Buddhist Monasteries of Northeast India



Overview of the Buddhist Heritage Circuit What is the

Buddhist Heritage Circuit?

The Buddhist Heritage Circuit is a cultural and tourism initiative designed to connect important Buddhist sites across Northeast India.

The programme focuses on:

- Conservation of historic monasteries and temples
- Improvement of tourism facilities
- Better connectivity between pilgrimage destinations
- Promotion of local culture and livelihoods
- Sustainable regional development

By linking major Buddhist centres, the initiative seeks to showcase the rich Buddhist traditions of Northeast India to visitors from India and abroad.

Major Announcements in Union Budget 2026–27 Preservation of

Buddhist Sites

A dedicated scheme has been introduced to protect and develop important Buddhist monasteries and temples across the northeastern states.

Tourism Infrastructure Development

The government has proposed:

- Development of five major tourism destinations in the Purvodaya region.
- Deployment of 4,000 electric buses to improve tourist transportation and eco-friendly mobility.

Economic Growth Initiatives

An allocation of ₹5,000 crore over five years has been announced for the development of CITY Economic Regions (CERs), which aim to promote urban and industrial growth.

Enhanced Connectivity

The initiative will be supported by the East Industrial Corridor, improving transportation networks and connecting tourist destinations with markets and economic centres.

Important Buddhist Monasteries in Northeast India

1. Arunachal Pradesh: Centre of Himalayan Buddhism

Arunachal Pradesh has the largest concentration of Buddhist monasteries in Northeast India, particularly in the Tawang and West Kameng regions.

1. Tawang Monastery

- Largest monastery in India and among the largest in the world.
- Established in the 17th century.
- Located at an altitude of about 10,000 feet.
- Houses a magnificent gilded Buddha statue.

2. Bomdila Monastery

- An important centre of Mahayana Buddhism.
- Known for its peaceful surroundings and Himalayan views.
- Serves as a centre for Buddhist learning and meditation.

3. Urgelling Monastery

- Birthplace of the Sixth Dalai Lama.
- One of the oldest monasteries in the region.

- Dates back to the 15th century.

4. Golden Pagoda

- A striking Buddhist monument built in Burmese architectural style.
- Famous for its golden structure and landscaped surroundings.
- Represents the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

5. Taktsang Gompa

- Popularly known as the "Tiger's Nest of India."
- Associated with the meditation of **Guru Padmasambhava**.
- Located near the India–Bhutan border.

II. Sikkim: Land of Ancient Monasteries

Sikkim is home to several monasteries belonging to the Nyingma and Kagyu traditions of Tibetan Buddhism.

1. Rumtek Monastery



- Largest monastery in Sikkim.
- Serves as the seat-in-exile of the Karmapa lineage.
- Renowned for Buddhist education and religious studies.

2. Pemayantse Monastery

- One of the oldest monasteries in the state.
- Holds significant religious importance within the Nyingma tradition.
- Known for its historical and architectural value.

3. Enchey Monastery

- Located near Gangtok.
- Built on a site associated with a revered Buddhist master.
- Hosts important religious festivals.

4. Tashiding Monastery

- Considered one of the holiest monasteries in Sikkim.
- Attracts pilgrims from across the Himalayan region.

5. Dubdi Monastery

- Oldest monastery in Sikkim.
 - Established in 1701.
 - Closely linked with the history of the former Sikkim kingdom.
-

III. Other Significant Buddhist Sites

1. Ghoom Monastery

- Located in Darjeeling near the Northeast region.
- Famous for its large statue of **Maitreya Buddha**.
- An important stop for Buddhist pilgrims and tourists.

2. Namphake Monastery

- Associated with the Tai-Phake community.
- One of Assam's oldest Theravada Buddhist monasteries.
- Known for its traditional architecture and cultural significance.

3. Venuvan Vihara

- Important Buddhist centre in Tripura.
 - Houses a Buddha statue brought from Myanmar.
 - Serves as a place of worship and meditation.
-

Importance of the Buddhist Heritage Circuit

- **Cultural Preservation**

The initiative will help conserve ancient monasteries, manuscripts, artwork, and architectural heritage.

- **Tourism Promotion**

Improved infrastructure and connectivity are expected to attract both domestic and international visitors.

- **Economic Opportunities**

Growth in tourism can generate employment and support local communities through hospitality, handicrafts, transport, and related services.

- **Strengthening Regional Identity**

The project highlights the rich Buddhist traditions of Northeast India and promotes awareness of its historical and cultural contributions.

10. Odisha's Buddhist Diamond Triangle:

A Landmark of India's Buddhist Heritage

The UNESCO World Heritage Centre has recently included Odisha's **Buddhist Diamond Triangle** in India's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites. This recognition highlights the historical, cultural, and religious importance of three ancient Buddhist centres—Lalitgiri, Udayagiri, and Ratnagiri—which together preserve over 1,500 years of Buddhist history.

Buddhist Diamond Triangle of Odisha What is

the Buddhist Diamond Triangle?

The **Buddhist Diamond Triangle** refers to a group of three major Buddhist archaeological sites located in the districts of **Jajpur District** and **Cuttack District**.

These sites are significant because they illustrate the evolution of Buddhism through its major traditions:

- **Theravada Buddhism**
- **Mahayana Buddhism**
- **Vajrayana Buddhism**

Together, they provide valuable insights into the growth of Buddhist philosophy, education, art, and architecture in eastern India.

1. Lalitgiri: One of the Earliest Buddhist Centres Historical

Background

Lalitgiri is considered the oldest among the three sites and dates back to around the 2nd–3rd century BCE.

Important Discoveries

Sacred Relic Stupa

Archaeologists discovered a large stupa containing relic caskets made of:

- Gold
- Silver
- Stone

These relics are believed by many scholars and devotees to be associated with **Gautama Buddha**.

Architectural Features

Lalitgiri contains an east-facing apsidal prayer hall (Chaityagriha), one of the earliest examples found in Odisha.

Centre of Learning

Ancient inscriptions indicate that the site functioned as an important Buddhist educational institution for many centuries.

2. Udayagiri: The Hill of Monasteries

3.

4. Overview

Udayagiri is the largest complex within the Diamond Triangle and flourished from the 1st century CE to the 13th century CE.

Architectural Highlights

Multi-Level Monasteries

The site is known for its impressive monastery structures, including a rare two-storeyed monastery.

Madhavapura Mahavihara

One of the important educational and religious establishments located within the complex.

Artistic Significance



The site contains magnificent sculptures of:

- Avalokiteshvara
- The Five Dhyani Buddhas

These artworks reflect the development and influence of Mahayana Buddhism in the region.

5. Ratnagiri: Centre of Vajrayana Buddhism

Historical Importance

Ratnagiri emerged as a major centre of Vajrayana Buddhism and is often compared with renowned Buddhist universities of ancient India.

Rich Sculptural Heritage



The site contains numerous sculptures associated with Vajrayana traditions, including representations of:

- **Tara**
- **Vajrapani**
- **Jambhala**

Role of Female Patrons

Historical evidence suggests that women played an important role in supporting Buddhist institutions at Ratnagiri. Among them was **Queen Karpurashri**, who is believed to have

contributed to the site's development.

Unique Architectural Style

Ratnagiri's monuments display a blend of Buddhist and Brahmanical architectural elements, creating a distinctive artistic tradition.

Evolution of Buddhism Through the Diamond Triangle

The three sites together demonstrate the gradual transformation of Buddhism over many centuries:

Site	Main Significance
Lalitgiri	Early Buddhist traditions and relic worship
Udayagiri	Growth of Mahayana Buddhism and monastic learning
Ratnagiri	Development of Vajrayana Buddhism and tantric practices

This progression makes the Diamond Triangle one of the most important Buddhist heritage regions in India.

11. Saranath:

The Sacred Site of Buddha's First Sermon

Introduction to Sarnath

What is Sarnath?

Sarnath is one of the most important pilgrimage centres in Buddhism. It is located about 10 kilometers northeast of **Varanasi**.

The site is revered as the place where **Gautama Buddha** delivered his first sermon after attaining enlightenment. This event marked the beginning of the Buddhist community, known as the Sangha.

Along with **Lumbini**, **Bodh Gaya**, and **Kushinagar**, Sarnath is considered one of the four holiest Buddhist sites.

Historical Background

Ancient Names

In ancient Buddhist texts, Sarnath was known as:

- Mrigadava (Deer Park)
- Rishipatana

These names reflect its importance as a peaceful place where sages and seekers gathered.

Connection with Buddha

After attaining enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, Buddha came to Sarnath and preached his first discourse, known as the **Dhammachakkappavattana Sutta** (Setting the Wheel of Dharma in Motion).

This sermon introduced the core teachings of Buddhism and laid the foundation for the spread of the religion.

Role of Emperor Ashoka Development as a

Buddhist Centre

The importance of Sarnath increased significantly during the reign of **Ashoka** in the 3rd century BCE.

Major Contributions

- Construction of stupas and monasteries.
- Erection of the famous Ashokan Pillar.
- Promotion of Buddhism across India and beyond.

The Lion Capital of the Ashokan Pillar later became the National Emblem of India.

Growth and Prosperity Flourishing

Under Great Dynasties

Sarnath continued to prosper under several ruling dynasties.

Kushana Period

The **Kushana Dynasty** expanded Buddhist institutions and supported monastic activities.

Gupta Period

The **Gupta Dynasty** contributed to the construction of beautiful monasteries, temples, and sculptures, making Sarnath a major centre of learning and art.

For many centuries, monks, scholars, and pilgrims visited the site from different parts of Asia.

Decline of Sarnath Destruction and

Abandonment

Around the 12th century CE, Sarnath suffered severe destruction during invasions.

Consequences

- Monasteries and temples were damaged.
- Buddhist monks left the region.
- The site gradually fell into ruin.

For nearly seven hundred years, many of its structures remained buried and forgotten.

Rediscovery of the Ancient Site Revival

of Historical Interest

The modern rediscovery of Sarnath began in the late 18th century.

Key Events

Babu Jagat Singh's Discovery

In 1787–88, workers employed by **Babu Jagat Singh** accidentally unearthed Buddhist

sculptures while collecting building materials.

Early Documentation

In 1799, **Jonathan Duncan** reported these findings, attracting scholarly attention.

Identification of Sarnath

During 1835–36, **Alexander Cunningham** confirmed that the site was the location of Buddha's first sermon.

Scientific Excavations

Between 1904 and 1905, **Friedrich Oertel** conducted systematic excavations and recovered hundreds of artifacts and inscriptions.

Major Attractions at Sarnath Dhamek

Stupa

The **Dhamek Stupa** is the most prominent monument at Sarnath.

Significance

- Marks the location of Buddha's first sermon.
- Features impressive stone carvings and masonry work.
- Remains an important pilgrimage destination.

Ashokan Pillar and Lion Capital

The remains of the **Ashokan Pillar** stand as a symbol of India's Buddhist heritage.

Importance

- Built by Emperor Ashoka.
- The Lion Capital from this pillar serves as India's National Emblem.
- Represents peace, courage, and righteous governance.

Sarnath Archaeological Museum

The **Sarnath Archaeological Museum** preserves many treasures recovered from the site.

Notable Collections

- Buddha sculptures
- Stone inscriptions
- Monastic relics
- The original Lion Capital

One of its most famous exhibits is a beautifully sculpted seated Buddha in the Dharmachakra Mudra.

Importance of Sarnath Today Religious

Significance

Sarnath remains one of the most sacred destinations for Buddhists worldwide.

Historical Importance

The site provides valuable evidence about the development of Buddhism in ancient India.

Cultural Heritage

Its monuments, sculptures, and inscriptions reflect India's rich artistic and spiritual traditions.

Global Recognition

The nomination for UNESCO World Heritage status highlights Sarnath's outstanding universal value and its importance to world history.

Section C: Scripts, Languages & Literature

12. Tamil Brahmi Script:

Evidence of Ancient Tamil Trade Connections with Egypt

Recent archaeological findings have revealed inscriptions written in the Tamil Brahmi script in Egypt's **Valley of the Kings**, dating between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE. These discoveries provide important evidence of long-distance trade and cultural interactions between ancient Tamil regions and the Mediterranean world.

Discovery and Historical Significance Inscriptions

Found in Egypt

Researchers identified several Tamil Brahmi inscriptions at the Valley of the Kings, indicating the presence of Tamil-speaking merchants or traders in ancient Egypt.

References to Tamil Traders

The inscriptions contain names believed to belong to traders and commercial representatives, including:

- Cikai Korran ("Crown Leader")
- Kopan
- Catan
- Kiran

These names suggest the active participation of Tamil merchants in international trade networks connecting South India with West Asia and North Africa.

Link with Sangam Literature Mention of

"Korran"

The title **Korran** found in the inscriptions is noteworthy because it also appears in **Sangam Literature**.

- In Sangam texts, the term is associated with leadership and royalty.

- A ruler of the **Chera Dynasty** is directly addressed as "Korran," highlighting the cultural and linguistic continuity between literary sources and archaeological evidence.

Tamil Brahmi Script: An Overview Origin and

Development

Tamil Brahmi is an early adaptation of the Brahmi script specifically modified to represent the sounds and grammatical features of the Tamil language.

Period of Use

- The script was widely used between **300 BCE and 100 CE**.
- It represents one of the earliest known writing systems employed for recording the Tamil language.

Characteristics

- Derived from the broader Brahmi writing tradition.
- Adapted to accommodate unique Tamil phonetic sounds.
- Found on cave inscriptions, pottery, coins, and trade-related artefacts across South India and beyond.

Literary Importance

Association with Classical Tamil Literature

Tamil Brahmi played a crucial role in the development of early Tamil literary traditions.

One of the most celebrated works linked to the early phase of Tamil literary culture is **Thirukkural**, authored by **Thiruvalluvar**. The text remains one of the most influential works in Tamil literature and ethical philosophy.

Significance of the Discovery

The inscriptions discovered in Egypt are important because they:

- Confirm extensive maritime trade links between ancient Tamilakam and foreign civilizations.
- Demonstrate the widespread use of Tamil Brahmi beyond the Indian subcontinent.

- Strengthen evidence of Tamil merchants' participation in international commerce.

Highlight the cultural and economic influence of South India during the early centuries of the Common Era.

13. Ol Chiki Script:

A Milestone in the Preservation of Santhali Language

The President of India recently inaugurated the centenary celebrations of the Ol Chiki script, marking 100 years since its creation. The script represents a significant achievement in preserving and promoting the linguistic and cultural identity of the Santhal community.

About the Ol Chiki Script Origin and

Development

- The Ol Chiki script was developed in 1925 by **Raghunath Murmu**.
- It was specifically designed to provide a dedicated writing system for the Santhali language, which previously lacked its own script.

Transition from Oral to Written Tradition

- The introduction of Ol Chiki enabled the Santhali language to evolve from a predominantly oral tradition into a well-documented written language.
- It played a crucial role in preserving folklore, literature, cultural practices, and historical knowledge of the Santhal community.

Earlier Writing Systems

Before the development of Ol Chiki, Santhali was written using several other scripts, including:

- Roman script
- Bengali script
- Odia script
- Devanagari script

The creation of a unique script helped strengthen the linguistic identity of Santhali

speakers and promoted the standardization of the language.

Santhali Language: An Overview

Linguistic Classification

- Santhali belongs to the **Austroasiatic Language Family**.
- It is one of the most widely spoken tribal languages in India.

Geographical Distribution

Santhali is spoken across several regions of eastern India, including:

- **Jharkhand**
- **Odisha**
- **West Bengal**
- **Assam**
- **Bihar**

The language is also spoken by communities in:

- **Nepal**
- **Bangladesh Constitutional**

Recognition Inclusion in the

Eighth Schedule

- Santhali received official recognition through the **92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003**.
- The amendment included Santhali in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution of India, granting it the status of a recognized Indian language.

Significance of Ol Chiki

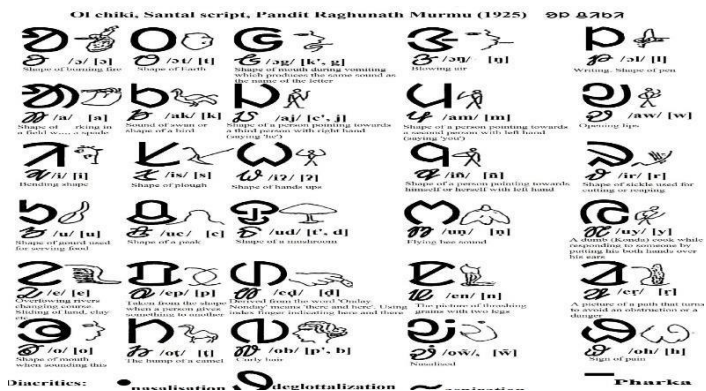
The Ol Chiki script has contributed significantly to:

- Preservation of Santhal cultural heritage.
- Development of Santhali literature and education.
- Promotion of linguistic identity and community pride.

Expansion of publishing, research, and digital content in the Santhali language

14. Centenary of Ol Chiki Script (1925–2025):

A Milestone in Tribal Literary Heritage



Why is it in News?

The Government of India inaugurated the **100th anniversary celebrations of the Ol Chiki Script (1925–2025)** in 2026. The event highlighted the script's contribution to preserving the language, literature, and cultural identity of the Santhal community.

Ol Chiki Script at a Glance

Particular	Details
Script Name	Ol Chiki
Developed By	Pandit Raghunath Murmu
Year of Creation	1925
Language	Santhali
Language Family	Austroasiatic (Munda Branch)
Popularly Known As	Ol Cemet'
Constitutional Recognition	Santhali added to Eighth Schedule (2003)

What is Ol Chiki Script?

Ol Chiki is the official writing system designed specifically for the **Santhali language**, one of India's major tribal languages.

Before its creation, Santhali was written using scripts such as Bengali, Odia, Roman, and Devanagari. These scripts could not accurately represent many unique Santhali sounds. To solve this problem, Pandit Raghunath Murmu developed Ol Chiki in 1925.

Founder: Pandit Raghunath Murmu Who

Was He?

- A renowned Santhal scholar, writer, and social reformer.
- Revered as "**Guru Gomke**" (Great Teacher).
- Dedicated his life to promoting Santhali language and culture.

Major Contribution

- Developed the Ol Chiki script.
- Encouraged literacy among tribal communities.
- Wrote literary works that popularized the script.

Literary Importance of Ol Chiki

1. Growth of Santhali Literature

- Enabled the publication of books, poems, plays, and folk stories in the native language.
- Preserved oral traditions by converting them into written form.

2. Development of Tribal Education

- Schools and educational institutions began teaching Santhali through Ol Chiki.
- Increased literacy among Santhal-speaking communities.

3. Promotion of Indigenous Knowledge

- Helped document tribal customs, folklore, songs, and traditional knowledge.
- Preserved valuable cultural heritage for future generations.

4. Expansion of Modern Literature

- Encouraged the emergence of modern Santhali writers and poets.
- Facilitated translation of government documents and educational materials.

Cultural Significance Preservation of

Identity

- Strengthened the cultural identity of the Santhal community.
- Became a symbol of tribal pride and self-expression.

Protection of Oral Traditions

- Helped preserve folk tales, myths, songs, and rituals that were previously transmitted orally.

Cultural Revival

- Promoted Santhali theatre, music, and literature.
- Encouraged cultural awareness among younger generations.

Digital Inclusion

- The script is now used in digital platforms, publications, and educational resources.
- In 2025, the Constitution of India was translated into Santhali using Ol Chiki, improving access to governance and legal information.

Key Features of the Script

- Contains **30 basic letters**.
- Follows the principle of **one symbol for one sound**.
- Represents Santhali pronunciation accurately.
- Does not use complex conjunct letters.
- Developed independently and is not derived from Brahmi or Roman scripts.

Constitutional and National Recognition Eighth

Schedule Status

- Santhali was included in the **Eighth Schedule of the Constitution** through the **92nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003**.

Importance

- Recognition as one of India's official languages.
- Greater support for education, literature, and cultural preservation.

Other Important Tribal Languages and Scripts for IMPORTANT (2025–26)

Language	Tribe/Community	Script
Santhali	Santhal	Ol Chiki
Gondi	Gond	Various scripts including Gunjala Gondi
Mundari	Munda	Mundari Bani
Ho	Ho Tribe	Warang Citi
Kui	Kondh	Odia-based writing
Bodo	Bodo	Devanagari
Kokborok	Tripuri	Roman & Bengali

Important Personalities

- **Pandit Raghunath Murmu** – Creator of Ol Chiki Script.
- Known as **Guru Gomke**.

Important Tribe

- **Santhal Tribe**
- Found mainly in Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam.

15. Sahitya Akademi Awards 2025

Recently, the **Sahitya Akademi** announced the **Sahitya Akademi Awards 2025** for outstanding literary works in 24 recognized Indian languages.

Some of the notable recipients include:

- **Navtej Sarna** for the English novel **Crimson Spring**. **Mamta Kalia** for the Hindi memoir **Jeete Jee Allahabad**.

These awards recognize excellence in literature and encourage creative writing in various Indian languages.

About Sahitya Akademi

India's National Academy of Letters

The Sahitya Akademi is popularly known as **India's National Academy of Letters**. It is the country's leading institution dedicated to the promotion of literature and literary activities.

Administrative Status

- It functions as an autonomous organization under the **Ministry of Culture**.
- Although supported by the government, it operates independently in literary matters.

Objectives of Sahitya Akademi

The Akademi works to promote literature and strengthen cultural exchange among India's diverse linguistic communities. Its major functions include:

- Encouraging literary creativity and excellence.
- Supporting translation of works between Indian languages.
- Publishing books, journals, and literary studies.
- Organizing seminars, discussions, workshops, and literary events.
- Promoting interaction among writers from different regions of the country.

Languages Covered

Sahitya Akademi carries out its activities in **24 Indian languages**, including English. This helps preserve and promote India's rich linguistic and literary heritage.

History of Sahitya Akademi Origin of

the Idea

- The concept of a national literary academy emerged before India's independence.

- In 1944, the **Royal Asiatic Society** proposed the establishment of a national institution for literature.

Post-Independence Initiative

- After independence, the Government of India took steps to create such an institution.
- The initiative received strong support from **Maulana Abul Kalam Azad**, who believed in promoting India's literary and cultural traditions.

Establishment and Inauguration

- Sahitya Akademi was formally established in **1952**.
- It was officially inaugurated on **12 March 1954**.

Registration as an Autonomous Body

- In **1956**, the Akademi was registered as a society.
- It was structured as an autonomous institution to ensure freedom in literary and cultural activities.

Significance of the Sahitya Akademi Awards

The Sahitya Akademi Awards are among India's most prestigious literary honors. They:

- Recognize outstanding literary contributions.
- Encourage writers across different languages.
- Promote regional literature at the national level.
- Strengthen India's multilingual literary tradition.
- Help preserve and enrich the country's cultural heritage.

Section D: Social Reform & Historical Movements

15. Mahad Satyagraha:

A Landmark Struggle for Equality and Social Justice

The year 2026–27 marks the centenary of the **Mahad Satyagraha**, one of the most significant movements in India's fight against caste-based discrimination. Led by **B. R. Ambedkar**, the movement asserted the fundamental rights and dignity of the oppressed communities and became a turning point in the struggle for social equality.

Overview of the Mahad Satyagraha What

Was the Mahad Satyagraha?

The Mahad Satyagraha, also known as the **Chawdar Tank Satyagraha**, was a non-violent protest organized in 1927 at Mahad in present-day Maharashtra. Its primary objective was to secure equal access for Dalits (then referred to as "untouchables") to public water sources, particularly the Chawdar Tank.

The movement represented a decisive shift from petitions and appeals to direct action against social exclusion and caste-based oppression.

Social Empowerment Day

The date **20 March** is commemorated as **Social Empowerment Day** in recognition of the historic significance of the movement.

Historical Background

Social Exclusion and Untouchability

For centuries, members of the depressed classes were denied access to public facilities such as wells, tanks, schools, and temples due to the rigid caste system and notions of purity and pollution.

Legislative Efforts Before the Satyagraha Bombay

Legislative Council Resolution (1923)

In 1923, the Bombay Legislative Council passed a resolution allowing untouchables to use publicly funded water sources and institutions.

Mahad Municipality Decision (1924)

The Mahad Municipality subsequently endorsed the resolution and declared the Chawdar Tank open to all citizens. However, despite the legal provision, social discrimination prevented its implementation.

Conference at Mahad

To challenge this injustice, the Kolaba District Depressed Classes organized a conference at Mahad on 19–20 March 1927 and invited **B. R. Ambedkar** to preside over it.

Major Events of the Movement The

March to Chawdar Tank

On 20 March 1927, Dr. Ambedkar led a peaceful procession to the Chawdar Tank.

Symbolic Assertion of Rights

- Ambedkar publicly drank water from the tank.
- Thousands of followers joined him, asserting their right to access public resources.
- The act symbolized a rejection of caste-based exclusion and a demand for equal citizenship.

Organizational Support

The movement was organized by the **Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha**, which worked for the welfare and empowerment of marginalized communities.

The Proposed Second Satyagraha

A second phase of the movement was planned for 25 December 1927 to reinforce the community's rights.

Legal Challenge

Before the event could take place, opponents filed a lawsuit claiming ownership of the tank and obtained a temporary court injunction.

Ambedkar's Response

Respecting the judicial process, Ambedkar postponed the agitation rather than violating the court order.

Judicial Victory

After a prolonged legal battle, the **Bombay High Court** ruled on 17 March 1937 that the Chawdar Tank was public property and could be accessed by all sections of society.

Key Personalities Associated with the Movement

Several reformers and leaders supported the Mahad Satyagraha, including:

- S. K. Bole
- Surendranath Tipnis
- Subhedar Savadkar
- Anantrao Chitre
- Ramachandra Babaji More

Influence of Mahatma Gandhi

The movement reflected several elements associated with the philosophy of **Mahatma Gandhi**.

Shared Principles

- Commitment to non-violent protest.
- Peaceful public demonstrations.
- Emphasis on discipline and self-restraint.

Gandhi expressed support for the movement through his writings in *Young India*, appreciating the restraint and determination displayed by the participants.

Impact of the Mahad Satyagraha

Impact on the Dalit Movement

Building Collective Consciousness

The movement successfully mobilized large sections of the oppressed communities and instilled:

- Self-confidence
- Self-respect
- Awareness of civil rights
- Faith in collective action

Social Transformation

Following Ambedkar's call for reform, many caste-based practices imposed upon Dalits began to be challenged and abandoned.

Participation of Women

The movement witnessed significant participation by Dalit women, marking an important development in social reform movements of the period.

Impact on the National Freedom Movement

The Mahad Satyagraha compelled the broader nationalist movement to confront the issue of untouchability more directly.

Reform Initiatives

- In 1928, **Jamnalal Bajaj** opened the Lakshminarayan Temple in Wardha to Dalits.
- The **Indian National Congress** strengthened its efforts against untouchability by reorganizing its Anti-Untouchability Committee under **Madan Mohan Malaviya**.

Impact on the Constitution of India

The ideals of the Mahad Satyagraha strongly influenced constitutional guarantees in independent India.

Connection with Article 15

The demand for equal access to public facilities is reflected in **Article 15**, which prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.

Connection with Article 17

The movement's central objective found constitutional expression in **Article 17**, which abolished the practice of untouchability and declared its enforcement unlawful.

17. Other Important Dalit Movements Before Independence

1. Satyashodhak Samaj (1873)

Founded by **Jyotirao Phule**, the organization sought to challenge caste oppression and social inequality through education and reform.

2. Self-Respect Movement (1925)

Initiated by **E. V. Ramasamy** in Tamil Nadu, the movement advocated social equality, rationalism, and the eradication of caste discrimination.

3. Harijan Sevak Sangh (1932)

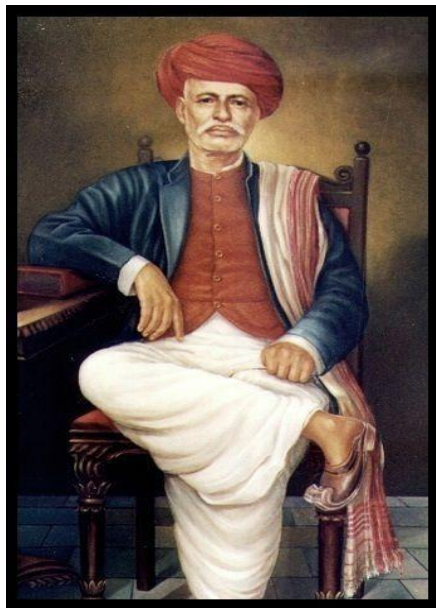
Established by **Mahatma Gandhi**, the organization worked for the removal of untouchability and the social upliftment of marginalized communities.

4. Legacy of the Mahad Satyagraha

Dr. Ambedkar compared the Mahad Satyagraha to the transformative role played by the French National Assembly during the **French Revolution**. The movement became a foundational struggle for liberty, equality, and fraternity in India.

It not only united the Dalit community but also inspired later campaigns such as the **Kalaram Temple Entry Movement**. Even today, the Mahad Satyagraha remains a powerful symbol of resistance against social injustice and a milestone in India's journey toward equality and human dignity.

17. Other Dalit Reform Movements in Modern India



Why in News?

The centenary commemorations of the **Mahad Satyagraha (1927–2027)** have renewed interest in major Dalit and social reform movements that challenged caste discrimination and promoted social equality in India. These movements are important for **IMPORTANT CSE Prelims and Mains** under Modern Indian History and Social Reform Movements.

1. Satyashodhak Samaj (1873)

Founder - Jyotirao Phule

Place - Maharashtra

Main Objective

The organization was established to fight caste-based oppression and social injustice. It aimed to provide dignity and equal rights to the lower castes and marginalized

communities.

Key Features

- Means "**Society of Truth Seekers.**"
- Opposed Brahmanical dominance and caste hierarchy.
- Promoted education for women and lower-caste communities.
- Encouraged social equality and rational thinking.
- Supported widow remarriage and opposed child marriage.

Significance

- Laid the foundation for anti-caste movements in modern India.
- Inspired later social justice and Dalit movements.

2. Self-Respect Movement (1925)

Founder

E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar)

Place

Tamil Nadu

Main Objective

To create a society based on equality, self-respect, and rationalism by eliminating caste discrimination and social inequalities.

Key Features

- Challenged caste hierarchy and untouchability.
- Advocated gender equality and women's rights.
- Encouraged inter-caste and self-respect marriages.
- Rejected social practices based on birth-based status.
- Promoted scientific temper and rational thought.

Significance

- Became a major force behind social justice politics in South India.

- Strengthened movements for equality and human dignity.

3. Harijan Sevak Sangh (1932)

Founder

Mahatma Gandhi

Background

Established after the **Poona Pact (1932)** to work for the welfare and upliftment of the communities then referred to as "Harijans."

Main Objective

To remove untouchability and improve the social and economic conditions of Dalits.

Key Activities

- Opened schools and hostels for marginalized communities.
- Promoted access to public places and temples.
- Conducted awareness campaigns against untouchability.
- Encouraged social integration and community welfare.

Significance

- Helped bring the issue of untouchability into mainstream national discourse.
- Supported efforts toward social inclusion and equality.

Movement	Year	Founder	Region	Main Objective
Satyashodhak Samaj	1873	Jyotirao Phule	Maharashtra	Social equality and anti-caste reform
Self-Respect Movement	1925	E.V. Ramasamy (Periyar)	Tamil Nadu	Self-respect, rationalism, caste abolition
Harijan Sevak Sangh	1932	Mahatma Gandhi	All India	Removal of untouchability and Dalit upliftment

Section E: Folk Dances, Festivals & Performing Arts

18. Bagurumba Dance: The Butterfly Dance of Assam



Why in News?

In 2026, the Prime Minister participated in "**Bagurumba Dwhou 2026**", highlighting the rich cultural heritage of the Bodo community of Assam. The event brought national attention to one of Northeast India's most graceful folk dance traditions.

What is Bagurumba Dance?

Bagurumba is a traditional folk dance performed by the **Bodo tribe**, one of the largest indigenous communities of Assam. It is often called the "**Butterfly Dance of Assam**" because the dancers imitate the gentle movements of butterflies, birds, flowers, and other elements of nature.

Origin and Region

Community

- Practised by the **Bodo people**.

State

- Assam

Cultural Zone

- Mainly performed in the **Bodoland region** of Assam.

Key Features of Bagurumba

Nature-Inspired Dance

- Dance movements are inspired by butterflies, birds, rivers, trees, and flowers.
- Reflects the close relationship between humans and nature.

Group Performance

- Usually performed by groups of young women.
- Dancers move in circles and lines, creating elegant visual patterns.

Traditional Attire

- Women wear colourful **Dokhona**, the traditional dress of Bodo women.
- Traditional ornaments enhance the beauty of the performance.

Musical Accompaniment

Male artists generally play traditional instruments such as:

- Kham (drum)
- Sifung (bamboo flute)
- Jotha (cymbals)
- Serja (traditional string instrument)

Cultural Significance

- Symbolizes **peace, harmony, joy, and prosperity**.
- Represents the Bodo community's respect for nature.
- Serves as an important medium for preserving tribal identity and cultural traditions.
- Promotes community bonding and collective celebration.

Association with Festivals Bwisagu

Festival

- Most closely associated with **Bwisagu**, the Bodo New Year festival.

- Celebrated during spring and the agricultural season.

Domasi Festival

- Also performed during **Domasi**, another important Bodo cultural celebration.

IMPORTANT CSE Quick Facts

Feature	Details
Dance Form	Folk Dance
State	Assam
Community	Bodo Tribe
Popular Name	Butterfly Dance of Assam
Performed By	Primarily Bodo women
Major Festival	Bwisagu
Theme	Nature, harmony, fertility, joy
Instruments	Kham, Sifung, Jotha, Serja

18. Harvest Festivals of India:

Celebrating Agriculture, Seasons, and Cultural Heritage

Harvest festivals are an integral part of India's cultural landscape. Celebrated in various regions under different names and traditions, these festivals signify the completion of agricultural cycles, the arrival of a new season, and gratitude for a bountiful harvest. Many of them also coincide with the Sun's northward movement, known as **Uttarayana**, which holds special significance in Indian astronomy and culture.

Significance of Harvest Festivals

Harvest festivals across India serve multiple purposes:

- Express gratitude to nature, the Sun, and agricultural communities.
- Celebrate the successful harvesting of crops.
- Mark seasonal transitions and the beginning of auspicious periods.
- Strengthen social bonds through communal gatherings, rituals, and cultural performances.

Major Harvest Festivals in India

1. Makar Sankranti (Maharashtra)

- Makar Sankranti marks the Sun's entry into the zodiac sign of Capricorn (Makara).
- It signifies the beginning of Uttarayana, considered an auspicious period in the Hindu calendar.
- The festival is celebrated through prayers, charitable activities, and the exchange of traditional sweets.

2. Uttarayana (Gujarat and Rajasthan)

- In Gujarat and parts of Rajasthan, the harvest season is celebrated as Uttarayana.
- The festival is particularly famous for vibrant kite-flying events that fill the skies with colorful kites.
- It symbolizes joy, prosperity, and the increasing influence of sunlight as the Sun moves northward.

3. Pongal (Tamil Nadu)

- Pongal is a four-day harvest festival celebrated with great enthusiasm in Tamil Nadu.
- The celebrations include:
 - **Bhogi Pongal** – dedicated to discarding old possessions and welcoming new beginnings.
 - **Thai Pongal** – the main day of thanksgiving to the Sun God.
 - **Mattu Pongal** – honoring cattle for their contribution to agriculture.
 - **Kaanum Pongal** – a day for social visits and family gatherings.
- A special dish called **Pongal**, prepared from rice and lentils, is the centerpiece of the celebrations.

4. Lohri (Punjab)

- Celebrated on the eve of Makar Sankranti, Lohri marks the harvesting of Rabi crops.
- The festival is characterized by community bonfires around which people gather to sing folk songs and perform traditional dances.
- Popular dance forms associated with Lohri include **Bhangra** and **Gidda**.
- It is a festival of gratitude, prosperity, and communal celebration.

5. Magh Bihu (Assam)

- Also known as Bhogali Bihu, Magh Bihu celebrates the conclusion of the harvesting season in Assam.
- Festivities include:
 - Community feasts.
 - Traditional games and cultural activities.
 - Bonfires known as **Meji**, around which rituals are performed.
- The festival reflects the agrarian traditions and communal spirit of Assamese society.

6. Kanuma (Telangana)

- Kanuma is an important festival observed after the main harvest celebrations.
- It is dedicated to expressing gratitude toward farmers, livestock, and the agricultural sector.
- The festival recognizes the vital role of cattle and farming communities in sustaining rural livelihoods.

Common Themes Across Harvest Festivals

Despite regional variations, most harvest festivals share several common elements:

- Thanksgiving for agricultural abundance.
- Worship of the Sun, nature, and livestock.
- Community participation and social harmony.
- Traditional food, music, and dance.
- Celebration of prosperity and new beginnings.

20. Kathputli: Rajasthan's Traditional Art of String Puppetry

Jaipur's **Kathputli Nagar**, home to hundreds of puppeteer families, continues to preserve the rich heritage of **Kathputli**, one of India's oldest and most vibrant folk art traditions. This unique form of storytelling combines puppetry, music, dance, and folklore to entertain and educate audiences.

Kathputli Puppetry of Rajasthan.



What is Kathputli?

Kathputli is a traditional form of **string puppetry** that originated in Rajasthan. The word *Kathputli* comes from two Hindi words:

- **Kath** – meaning wood
- **Putli** – meaning doll or puppet

In this art form, colorful wooden puppets are controlled with strings to narrate stories based on history, folklore, legends, and social themes.

Origin and Historical Background Ancient Folk

Tradition

Kathputli is believed to have existed for more than a thousand years. It was traditionally practiced by the **Bhat** and **Nat** communities, who travelled from village to village performing puppet shows.

Role in Society

Before the advent of modern entertainment, Kathputli performances served as an important medium for:

- Storytelling
- Public education

- Cultural preservation
- Social awareness
- Entertainment during fairs and festivals

These performances were often held in royal courts, village gatherings, and community celebrations.

Major Centres of Kathputli Art

The tradition is primarily associated with **Rajasthan** and is widely practiced in:

- **Jaipur**
- **Nagaur**
- **Churu**
- **Sikar**

Among these, **Kathputli Nagar in Jaipur** is regarded as the largest living centre of traditional puppeteers.

Distinctive Features of Kathputli

Beautiful Wooden Puppets

Kathputli puppets are usually carved from wood and decorated with:

- Bright colors
- Large expressive eyes
- Elaborate facial features
- Traditional ornaments

Their exaggerated expressions make them easily visible to large audiences.

Colorful Traditional Costumes

The puppets wear vibrant costumes inspired by Rajasthan's royal and desert culture.

Common attire includes:

- Flowing skirts
- Turbans
- Embroidered garments
- Traditional jewelry

These costumes add visual appeal and authenticity to the performances.

Music and Performance

A Kathputli show combines puppetry with folk music and narration.

Traditional musical instruments used include:

- Dholak
- Harmonium
- Cymbals

The narrator often provides dialogues, songs, and commentary while controlling the puppets.

Themes Depicted in Kathputli Shows Historical

Narratives

Many performances recount the stories of Rajput rulers and legendary warriors.

Folk Legends

Popular local heroes and folklore characters frequently appear in puppet dramas.

Social Messages

Modern performances also address issues such as:

- Education
- Health awareness
- Environmental protection
- Social harmony

Moral Lessons

Stories often convey values such as honesty, courage, wisdom, and justice.

Cultural Importance of Kathputli Preserving Oral

Traditions

Kathputli helps keep Rajasthan's folklore and traditional narratives alive across generations.

Community Identity

The art form remains an important source of livelihood and cultural identity for puppeteer communities.

Tourism and Heritage

Kathputli performances attract tourists from India and abroad, showcasing Rajasthan's rich artistic heritage.

Traditional Puppetry Forms Across India

India has a diverse puppetry tradition, with each region developing its own unique style.

State/Region	Important Puppetry Forms
Tamil Nadu	Bommalattam, Tolu Bommalatam, Pava Koothu
Kerala	Tolpava Koothu, Pavakathakali, Nool Pavakoothu
Andhra Pradesh	Tolu Bommalata, Koyya Bommalata, Keelu Bommalata
Karnataka	Togalu Gombeyata, Sutrada Gombeyata, Yakshagana Gombeyata
Maharashtra	Kalasutri Bahulya, Chamdyacha Bahulya
Rajasthan	Kathputli Ka Khel
Uttar Pradesh	Gulabo-Sitabo
Odisha	Ravanachhaya, Gopalila Kundhei, Kathi Kundhei Nacha
West Bengal	Putul Nach traditions
Tripura	Putul Nach
Assam	Putala Nach
Manipur	Laithibi Jagoi

Challenges and Preservation Efforts

Despite its cultural significance, Kathputli faces challenges such as:

- Declining audiences
- Competition from digital entertainment
- Limited financial support for artists

Efforts by cultural organizations, tourism departments, and local communities are helping preserve and promote this traditional art form through festivals, workshops, and heritage programs.

Section F: Tribal Culture & Indigenous Heritage

21. Bhil Tribe

Overview

- One of India's oldest tribal communities.
- Name derived from the Dravidian word "**Billu/Villu**" meaning bow.
- Traditionally known as skilled archers.

Distribution

- Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra.
- Smaller populations in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar, and Tripura.

Important Facts

- Associated with **Shabari** of the Ramayana.
- Led the **Bhagat Movement** under Govind Guru.
- Connected with the **Mangarh Massacre (1913)**.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Largest tribal group of Western India.

22. Santhal Tribe

Overview

- One of India's largest tribal communities.
- Speak **Santhali**, an Austroasiatic language.

Distribution

- Jharkhand, Odisha, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam.

Important Facts

- Associated with **Ol Chiki Script**, developed by **Raghunath Murmu** in 1925.
- Led the famous **Santhal Rebellion (1855–56)** against British rule.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Santhali language is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

23. Bodo Tribe

Overview

- Major indigenous community of Assam.
- Belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family.

Distribution

- Mainly in the Bodoland region of Assam.

Cultural Identity

- Famous for **Bagurumba Dance**.
- Celebrate **Bwisagu**, the Bodo New Year festival.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Bagurumba = Bodo Tribe = Assam.

24. Irula Tribe

Overview

- One of the oldest tribal groups of South India.

- Recognized as a Scheduled Tribe.

Distribution

- Tamil Nadu and Kerala, especially the Nilgiri region.

Key Features

- Expertise in snake catching.
- Deep knowledge of medicinal plants and forest resources.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Known for traditional snake-catching skills.

25. Kurumba Tribe

Overview

- Forest-dwelling tribal community of the Nilgiris.

Distribution

- Tamil Nadu's Nilgiri Hills.

Key Features

- Skilled honey gatherers.
- Use traditional vine ladders to climb steep cliffs.
- Rich traditions of folklore and ritual practices.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Associated with honey collection in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve.

26. Garo Tribe

Overview

- One of the major tribes of Northeast India.

- Call themselves **A'chik Mande**.

Distribution

- Predominantly in Meghalaya's Garo Hills.
- Also found in Assam, Tripura, and Bangladesh.

Unique Features

- Follow a **matrilineal system**.
- Property passes through the female line.

Festival

- **Wangala Festival**, celebrating the Sun God and harvest season.

IMPORTANT Pointer

Garo + Meghalaya + Matrilineal Society + Wangala Festival.

27. Adi Vaani Platform

What is Adi Vaani?

A digital language translation platform launched by the **Ministry of Tribal Affairs** to preserve and promote India's tribal languages.

Objectives

- Preserve endangered tribal languages.
- Improve access to education and governance.
- Promote indigenous literature and oral traditions.

Current Language Support

- Gondi
- Bhili
- Mundari

- Santali

Proposed Expansion

- Kui
- Garo

Key Features

- Translation between tribal languages, Hindi, and English.
- Mobile app and web-based platform.
- Community feedback system for improving translations.

Important Pointer

Adi Vaani = Tribal Language Translation Platform of Ministry of Tribal Affairs.

Quick Revision Table

Tribe	State/Region	Key Feature
Bhil	Rajasthan, Gujarat, MP, Maharashtra	Skilled archers
Santhal	Jharkhand, Odisha, WB	Ol Chiki Script
Bodo	Assam	Bagurumba Dance
Irula	Tamil Nadu, Kerala	Snake-catching expertise
Kurumba	Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu	Honey gathering
Garo	Meghalaya	Matrilineal society

28. Jharkhand's Megalithic Heritage:

Living Stone Monuments of Ancient Traditions

The Government of Jharkhand has begun efforts to secure **UNESCO World Heritage status** for its vast megalithic landscapes. These ancient stone monuments are not only archaeological treasures but also an important part of the living cultural traditions of several tribal communities in the state.

Megalithic Sites of Jharkhand



Understanding Megaliths

What are Megaliths?

Megaliths are large stone structures erected by ancient communities for various social, religious, and cultural purposes.

These structures include:

- Standing stones (Menhirs)
- Stone circles
- Dolmens (table-like stone structures)
- Burial slabs
- Cairns (heaps of stones)

They were often associated

with:

- Burial practices
- Ancestor remembrance

- Religious ceremonies
 - Territorial markers
 - Observation of celestial events
-

Distribution of Megalithic Sites in Jharkhand Major

Regions

Megalithic monuments are found across several districts of **Jharkhand**, particularly in:

Ranchi–Khunti Region

This area contains some of the state's most significant megalithic sites, including **Chokahatu Megalithic Site**, one of the largest megalithic burial grounds in Asia.

Hazaribagh Region

Known for clusters of monolithic stones and alignments that may have had ceremonial or astronomical significance.

Other Important Areas

Megalithic remains are also found in:

- Chatra
 - Ramgarh
 - Lohardaga
 - Gumla
 - Simdega
 - Singhbhum
-

Many villages in these regions maintain traditional burial grounds containing stone memorials.

Connection with Tribal Communities A Living

Cultural Tradition

Unlike many megalithic sites around the world that survive only as archaeological

remains, Jharkhand's megaliths remain closely linked to the traditions of local tribal communities.

Communities Associated with Megaliths

These traditions are especially connected with:

- Munda
- Ho
- Oraon
- Asur

For these communities, stone monuments continue to symbolize ancestry, identity, and collective memory.

Unique Features of Jharkhand's Megaliths Living

Megalithism

One of the most remarkable aspects of Jharkhand's megalithic tradition is that it is still practiced today.

Continuing Tradition

In several villages, families continue to install memorial stones to honour deceased ancestors.

is continuity between ancient and modern practices is rare and adds exceptional cultural value to the sites.

Traditional Types of Megaliths

Sasandiri

Sasandiri refers to dolmen-like burial structures traditionally used as family memorials or burial markers.

Birdiri (Biridiri)

Birdiri are upright standing stones erected to commemorate ancestors, important events, or community leaders.

These forms remain important symbols within tribal cultural life.

Astronomical Significance

Some megalithic sites appear to have been carefully aligned with the movement of the sun.

Ancient Observation Systems

Researchers believe that certain stone arrangements may have helped communities:

- Track seasonal changes
- Observe sunrise and sunset positions
- Identify solstices and equinoxes

Such alignments suggest an understanding of astronomy among ancient builders.

Multiple Functions

Not all megaliths served as burial monuments.

Different stones may have been used as:

- Memorial markers
- Boundary indicators
- Gathering places
- Astronomical reference points
- Sacred ritual spaces

This diversity reflects the complex social and cultural life of early communities.

Cultural and Historical Importance Preserving

Indigenous Heritage

The megaliths serve as enduring records of tribal traditions, beliefs, and social structures.

They help preserve:

- Oral histories
- Family lineages
- Ritual practices
- Community identities

Archaeological Value

These monuments provide valuable evidence for understanding the transition from prehistoric to historic societies in eastern India.

Researchers study them to gain insights into:

- Settlement patterns
- Religious beliefs
- Burial customs
- Social organization

Potential UNESCO Recognition

Jharkhand's nomination is strengthened by three major factors:

Extensive Cultural Landscape

The state contains a large concentration of interconnected megalithic sites.

Continuing Traditional Practices

The living nature of the tradition makes it distinct from many ancient megalithic sites elsewhere in the world.

Unique Cultural Significance

The combination of archaeology, indigenous heritage, and ongoing community participation gives these sites exceptional universal value.

Why These Sites Matter Today

The megaliths of Jharkhand are more than ancient stones. They represent centuries of indigenous knowledge, cultural memory, and community identity.

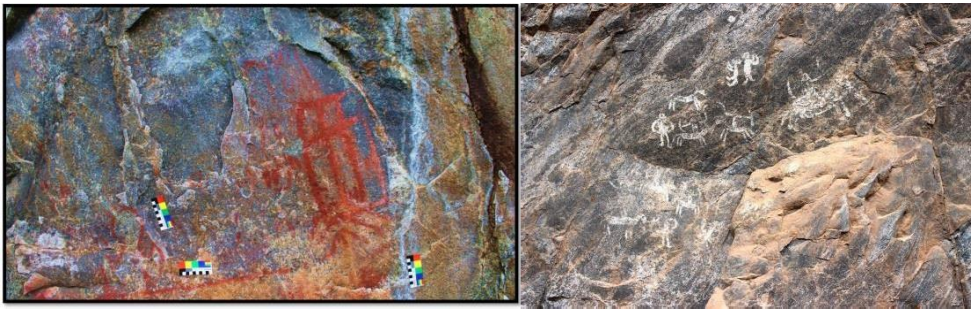
They remind us that heritage is not only preserved in monuments and museums but also in living traditions passed from one generation to another.

30. Prehistoric Rock Painting Site in the Nilgiris: A

Glimpse into Ancient Human Life

A prehistoric rock painting site has recently been re-discovered in the **Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu** by the Yaakai Heritage Trust. Located near **Vellarikombai village**, the site provides valuable insights into the artistic traditions, beliefs, and lifestyles of prehistoric communities that once inhabited the region.

Prehistoric Rock Painting Site in Nilgiris



Overview of the Site What is

the Site?

The site is an ancient rock art shelter situated at an altitude of approximately 1,100 meters above sea level near **Kotagiri** in the Nilgiri Hills.

The discovery adds to the rich archaeological heritage of the Nilgiris, which is already known for notable rock art locations such as:

- Eluthuparai
- Tholikkiparai

Location and Accessibility

Geographic Setting

The site is located northwest of **Vellarikombai**.

Access to the Site

- Visitors must climb nearly 450 meters along a steep rocky slope to reach the shelter.
- The site is generally accessible during the summer months.
- During the monsoon season, water flows over the rock surface, creating a waterfall-like effect that makes access difficult.

Features of the Rock Paintings Size of

the Painted Surface

The paintings cover a large rock face measuring approximately:

- Length: 638 cm
- Height: 540 cm

Artistic Technique

- All figures have been painted using **red ochre**, a natural pigment commonly used in prehistoric rock art across the world.
- The paintings have survived for centuries despite exposure to natural weathering.

Human and Anthropomorphic Figures

Researchers have identified around 30 clearly visible figures, including:

- Human representations
- Anthropomorphic (human-like) figures
- Figures wearing cone-shaped headgear
- Characters with elongated limbs

These depictions provide clues about the appearance, rituals, and cultural practices of prehistoric communities.

Symbolism and Cultural Meaning Ritual and

Spiritual Elements

Several motifs found at the site appear to have ritual significance, including:

- Rectangular designs filled with dots
- Ladder-like body patterns
- Symbolic geometric figures

These elements suggest that the paintings may have been connected to spiritual beliefs, ceremonies, or supernatural concepts practiced by prehistoric inhabitants.

Oor Pare: The Local Name of the Site Traditional

Significance

The rock shelter is locally known as **Oor Pare**.

For generations, indigenous tribal communities have used this location as a resting place during honey-collecting expeditions in the surrounding forests.

The site continues to hold cultural and spiritual importance for local communities.

Indigenous Communities Associated with the Site

The rock art shelter is considered sacred by the **Irula** and **Kurumba** tribes, two indigenous groups that have lived in the Nilgiri Biosphere for centuries.

Irula Tribe

Who Are the Irulas?

The **Irula Tribe** is one of the oldest tribal communities in southern India and is recognized as a Scheduled Tribe.

Habitat

Irula communities are primarily found in:

- Tamil Nadu
- **Kerala**

particularly in the Nilgiri region.

Distinctive Features

The Irulas are traditionally known for:

- Expertise in snake and rodent catching
- Knowledge of medicinal plants and herbal remedies
- Collection of forest products

- Strong understanding of local ecosystems

Kurumba Tribe

Who Are the Kurumbas?

The **Kurumba Tribe** is a forest-dwelling tribal group with a long history in the Nilgiri Hills.

Habitat

Kurumba settlements are generally found in the middle and lower elevations of the Nilgiris, often near rocky cliffs and forested areas.

Traditional Skills

The Kurumbas are especially famous for:

- Traditional honey gathering
- Climbing steep cliffs using handmade vine ladders
- Indigenous artistic traditions
- Rich folklore and spiritual practices

Importance of the Discovery

The rediscovery of this rock art site is significant because it:

- Expands knowledge of prehistoric human activity in the Nilgiri region.
- Provides evidence of ancient artistic and symbolic traditions.
- Highlights the cultural continuity between prehistoric communities and present-day tribal groups.
- Emphasizes the need to preserve archaeological and tribal heritage sites.
- Contributes to the study of early human beliefs, rituals, and social life in South India.

Section G: Traditional Arts, Crafts & Paintings

31. Bronze Sculpture Tradition in India:

A Legacy of Art, Faith, and Craftsmanship

The recent decision of the **Ashmolean Museum** to return a 16th-century bronze idol of **Tirumangai Alvar** has once again drawn attention to India's rich tradition of bronze sculpture. Research revealed that the idol originally belonged to the **Soundarrajaperumal Temple** before being replaced with a replica.

India's Bronze Heritage



Understanding Bronze Art

What is Bronze Art?

Bronze art refers to sculptures and ritual objects created using metal alloys, mainly bronze or brass. In South India, many sacred images are made using the **Panchaloha** tradition, which combines five metals.

These creations include:

- Temple idols
- Processional deities
- Lamps
- Religious vessels
- Decorative sculptures

In India, bronze sculptures are more than artistic masterpieces. Many are actively worshipped and play an important role in religious ceremonies and temple festivals.

Traditional Method of Bronze Casting The Lost-

Wax Technique

Indian bronze sculptures are primarily made using the ancient **lost-wax casting method**, known traditionally as **Madhuchista Vidhan**. **Step**

1: Creating the Wax Model

The artist first shapes the complete figure in wax, carefully adding all decorative details and ornaments.

Step 2: Preparing the Clay Mould

Several layers of fine clay are applied over the wax model to form a protective mould.

Step 3: Removing the Wax

The mould is heated, causing the wax inside to melt and flow out. This leaves an empty cavity in the shape of the sculpture.

Step 4: Pouring the Metal

Molten bronze or another metal alloy is poured into the cavity.

Step 5: Finishing the Sculpture

After cooling, the clay mould is broken. The sculpture is then polished, refined, and decorated. In the case of temple idols, special religious rituals are performed before the image is installed for worship.

Evolution of Bronze Sculpture in India Early

Beginnings

During the Harappan period, bronze was mainly used for tools and a few artistic creations. The Dancing Girl demonstrates the early mastery of metal casting techniques.

Growth During the Classical Period

Over time, bronze became increasingly important for making portable religious images associated with:

- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Jainism

These movable icons allowed religious traditions to spread across regions.

Development of Regional Styles

Different parts of India developed their own artistic traditions.

Important Schools

- **Gupta Empire** style bronzes known for elegance and refinement.
- **Pala-Sena Dynasty** Buddhist bronzes.
- Western Indian metal sculpture traditions.
- Himalayan and Kashmir bronze schools.

Each region contributed unique artistic features to Indian bronze craftsmanship.

Landmark Bronze Masterpieces in Indian History

1. The Dancing Girl of Mohenjo-daro

One of the earliest examples of metal sculpture in India is the **Dancing Girl**, dating to around 2500 BCE.

This small but remarkable figure demonstrates the advanced metalworking skills of the **Indus Valley Civilization**.

Daimabad Bronzes

The bronze objects discovered at **Daimabad** date to around 1500 BCE.

These large castings indicate the use of sophisticated metalworking techniques and may have served ceremonial or ritual purposes.

2. Chola Bronzes

The bronze sculptures produced during the **Chola Dynasty** (9th–13th centuries CE) represent the highest achievement of Indian bronze art.

Among them, the image of **Nataraja** is world-famous for its elegance, balance, and symbolic meaning.

Golden Age Under the Cholas

Bronze sculpture reached its artistic peak in Tamil Nadu during the Chola period.

These sculptures were specifically designed for:

- Temple processions
- Public worship
- Religious festivals

Their graceful forms and realistic proportions continue to inspire artists and historians worldwide.

3. Living Tradition of Bronze Casting

Swamimalai: A Centre of Traditional Craftsmanship

Even today, the town of **Swamimalai** remains one of India's most important centres for bronze casting.

Hereditary Artisans

Families of traditional sculptors, known as **Sthapathis**, continue to practice the lost-wax method passed down through generations.

Preservation of Ancient Knowledge

Their work follows traditional guidelines described in ancient **Shilpa Shastras**, ensuring continuity between India's artistic past and present.

Cultural and Religious Importance

Bronze sculptures occupy a unique position in Indian civilization because they combine:

- Artistic excellence
- Religious devotion
- Technical innovation
- Cultural heritage

Unlike many museum objects, numerous bronze idols continue to serve as living symbols of worship in temples across the country.

31. Sohrai Art

Why in News?

Sohrai Art of Jharkhand gained national attention during **Kala Utsav 2025** at Rashtrapati Bhavan, where it was recognized as a vibrant expression of India's cultural heritage.

Sohrai Art: A Living Tribal Heritage What is

Sohrai Art?

Sohrai Art is a traditional mural painting style practiced by tribal communities of Jharkhand, especially the **Santhal, Munda, and Oraon tribes**.

- Created mainly on the mud walls of houses.
- Traditionally painted by women.
- Uses natural colours obtained from soil, stones, and plants.
- Represents the close relationship between humans, animals, and nature.

When is it Practised?

Sohrai paintings are usually created during:

- Harvest celebrations
- Diwali period
- Festivals dedicated to cattle and agricultural prosperity

The art serves as a gesture of gratitude for a successful harvest and healthy livestock.

Major Areas of Practice

Sohrai Art is mainly found in:

- Hazaribagh
- Santhal Pargana
- Parts of Bihar and adjoining tribal regions

Distinctive Features

Nature-Based Themes

Common motifs include:

- Cows and bulls
- Elephants
- Deer
- Birds
- Trees and flowers
- Rural life scenes

Natural Colours

Artists use locally available materials:

Colour	Source
--------	--------

Red	Red ochre soil
White	Kaolin clay
Black	Manganese-rich earth
Yellow	Yellow clay

Traditional Tools

Instead of modern brushes, artists use:

- Bamboo twigs
- Chewed sticks
- Cloth pieces
- Fingers

Women-Centred Tradition

- Passed from one generation of women to another.
- Preserves tribal identity and community knowledge.

Cultural Importance

Symbol of Sustainable Living

Sohrai Art reflects:

- Respect for nature
- Ecological balance
- Traditional agricultural practices

Community Heritage

- Preserves oral traditions and tribal beliefs.
- Strengthens social and cultural bonds.

Living Folk Tradition

Unlike museum art, Sohrai continues to be practiced in everyday village life.

Quick Facts

Feature	Details
State	Jharkhand
Tribes	Santhal, Munda, Oraon
Type	Ritual wall painting
Artists	Mainly tribal women
Occasion	Harvest and Diwali festivals
Colours	Natural earth pigments
Themes	Animals, nature, agriculture

"SOHRAI = SOil + Harvest + Rural Art of India"

Important Fact: Kathputli Nagar in Jaipur is one of the largest settlements of traditional puppeteers.

32. Madhubani Painting



Key Facts

- Originated in Mithila region of Bihar.
- Uses natural colours and intricate patterns.
- Themes include mythology, nature, and social life.

33. Pattachitra Painting



Key Facts

- Traditional scroll painting of Odisha.
- Closely associated with Jagannath Temple.
- Painted on treated cloth using natural colours.

Revision Table

Craft/Tradition	State	Famous For
Sohrai Art	Jharkhand	Tribal wall paintings
Kathputli	Rajasthan	String puppetry
Madhubani	Bihar	Mithila paintings
Pattachitra	Odisha	Cloth scroll paintings
Bronze Casting	Tamil Nadu	Lost-wax sculptures
Bagurumba	Assam	Bodo folk dance
Ol Chiki	Jharkhand/Odisha	Santhali script

Section H: Geographical Indications & Cultural Economy

34. Bharat GI:

Promoting India's Geographical Indication Products Globally

Recently, the **Bharat GI** initiative was unveiled at the India AI Impact Summit. The initiative aims to create a unified platform for promoting India's Geographical Indication (GI) products in international markets and enhancing their global visibility.

What is Bharat GI? National

Umbrella Initiative

Bharat GI is a nationwide initiative designed to showcase and market India's diverse Geographical Indication (GI) products under a common brand identity. It seeks to highlight the uniqueness, authenticity, and cultural value of products associated with specific regions of the country.

Launching Authority

The initiative has been launched by the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade** under the **Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.

Objectives of Bharat GI Enhancing

Global Visibility

- Promote Indian GI-tagged products in international markets.
- Strengthen the global identity of region-specific Indian goods.
- Increase awareness about India's traditional crafts, agricultural products, and cultural heritage.

Supporting Local Producers

- Create better opportunities for artisans, weavers, farmers, and producer communities.
- Facilitate access to new domestic and overseas markets.

- Encourage value addition and sustainable livelihoods.

Key Benefits of the Initiative Stronger

International Recognition

Bharat GI aims to establish a distinctive global presence for Indian GI products, helping them gain wider recognition and consumer trust.

Premium Market Positioning

By emphasizing authenticity and regional uniqueness, the initiative can help GI products secure premium branding and better market value.

Improved Market Access

The platform is expected to connect producers with national and international buyers, thereby expanding commercial opportunities and boosting exports.

Importance of Geographical Indications

Geographical Indications (GIs) are intellectual property rights that identify products originating from a particular region and possessing qualities, reputation, or characteristics linked to that location.

Examples of Indian GI products include:

- Darjeeling Tea
- Banarasi Saree
- Alphonso Mango
- Mysore Sandalwood

Section I: Philosophy & Religious Thought

35. Jagadguru Madhvacharya: Pioneer of Dvaita Vedanta

Context: During his visit to Udupi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid tribute to the spiritual legacy of **Madhvacharya**, highlighting his enduring contribution to Indian philosophy, devotion, and cultural unity.

[Photographs of Madhvacharya and Udupi Heritage](#)



[Introduction to Madhvacharya](#)

[Who Was Madhvacharya?](#)

Madhvacharya was a celebrated philosopher, spiritual teacher, and theologian of medieval India. He founded the **Dvaita Vedanta** school of philosophy, which emphasizes the eternal distinction between God, the individual soul, and the material world.

He is regarded as one of the most influential saints in the Vaishnava tradition and is traditionally believed to be an incarnation of **Vayu**, the Wind God.

Early Life and Education

Birth and

Childhood

- Born as **Vasudeva** in **Pajaka**, near **Udupi**.
- Historians differ on his exact dates, but he is generally placed in the 13th century CE.
- Known from childhood for his exceptional intelligence, physical strength, and spiritual inclination.

Spiritual Journey

- Accepted **Sannyasa (monastic life)** at a young age.
- Became a disciple of **Achyutapreksha**, a respected spiritual teacher.
- Received the names **Purna Prajna** and later **Ananda Tirtha**, by which he is also known.

Philosophy of Dvaita Vedanta

Core Idea: Dualism

Madhvacharya taught that God, souls, and the universe are distinct and real. Unlike some philosophical schools that consider everything ultimately one, he emphasized that these differences are eternal.

The Five Fundamental Differences (Pancha-Bheda)

According to Madhvacharya, the following distinctions always exist:

1. Difference between God and the individual soul.
2. Difference between God and matter.
3. Difference between the soul and matter.
4. Difference between one soul and another.
5. Difference between one material object and another.

These distinctions form the foundation of his philosophical system.

Concept of

God

Supreme

Reality

- **Lord Vishnu (Narayana)** is the highest and independent reality.
- All living beings and the material world depend upon Him.
- Salvation can be attained only through the grace of Vishnu.

Sources of Knowledge

Madhvacharya accepted three valid means of acquiring knowledge:

- **Perception (Pratyaksha):** Knowledge gained through direct observation.
- **Inference (Anumana):** Logical conclusions based on evidence.
- **Scriptural Testimony (Shabda):** Knowledge derived from sacred texts.

Importance of Devotion

Bhakti as the Path to Liberation

Madhvacharya stressed that devotion to God is the most effective path to spiritual liberation.

According to his teachings:

- Mere intellectual understanding is not enough.
- Genuine devotion, faith, and surrender to Vishnu lead to moksha (liberation).
- Constant remembrance of God strengthens spiritual growth.

Literary

Contributions

Scholarly Works

Madhvacharya was a prolific writer and composed around 37 important Sanskrit works. His major writings include commentaries on:

- Bhagavad Gita
- **Brahma Sutras**
- Principal Upanishads
- Bhagavata Purana

These works continue to influence scholars and devotees today.

Establishment of Udupi Krishna Tradition Udupi

Krishna Mutt

One of Madhvacharya's most enduring contributions was the establishment of the **Udupi Sri Krishna Matha**.

Ashta Mathas

He organized the administration of the temple through eight monasteries, known as the **Ashta Mathas**.

These institutions:

- Preserve his teachings.
- Promote religious education.
- Continue centuries-old traditions of worship and scholarship.

Influence on the Bhakti Movement

Spiritual Impact

Madhvacharya played a significant role in strengthening the Bhakti tradition in India. His teachings:

- Encouraged personal devotion to Vishnu.
- Made spiritual practices accessible to ordinary people.
- Inspired future saints and philosophers.

Prominent Followers and Successors

His ideas influenced many notable scholars, including:

- Jayatirtha
- Vyasatirtha
- Raghavendra Tirtha

Legacy and Significance

Why Madhvacharya Remains

Important Philosophical

Contribution

He established Dvaita Vedanta as one of the major schools of Indian philosophy.

Religious Influence

His emphasis on devotion continues to guide millions of followers.

Cultural Heritage

The Udupi tradition remains a vibrant center of learning, spirituality, and service.

National Relevance

His teachings promote faith, discipline, moral values, and cultural unity.

Previous Year Questions

1. Discuss the salient features of the Harappan architecture. (150 words) [2025]
2. Examine the main aspects of Akbar's religious syncretism. (150 words) [2025]
3. The sculptors filled the Chandella artform with resilient vigor and breadth of life. Elucidate. (150 words) [2025]
4. Mahatma Jotirao Phule's writings and efforts of social reforms touched issues of almost all subaltern classes. Discuss. (150 words) [2025]
5. Underline the changes in the field of society and economy from the Rig Vedic to the Later Vedic period. [2024]
6. Estimate the contribution of Pallavas of Kanchi for the development of art and literature of South India. [2024]
7. Though the great Cholas are no more yet their name is still remembered with great pride because of their highest achievements in the domain of art and architecture. Comment. [2024]
8. Explain the role of geographical factors towards the development of Ancient India [150 words] [10 Marks] [2023]
9. What are the main features of Vedic society and religion? Do you think some of the features are still prevailing in Indian society? [250 words][15 Marks] [2023]
10. What were the major technological changes introduced during the Sultanate period? How did those technological changes influence the Indian society? [250 words][15 Marks] [2023]
11. How will you explain the medieval Indian temple sculptures represent the social life of those days? [150 words] [10 Marks] [2022]

12. Discuss the main contributions of Gupta period and Chola period to Indian heritage and culture.[250 words][15 Marks] **[2022]**
13. Discuss the significance of the lion and bull figures in Indian mythology, art and architecture. [250 words][15 Marks]**[2022]**
14. Evaluate the nature Of the Bhakti literature and its contribution to Indian culture.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2021]**
15. The rock-cut architecture represents one of the most important sources of our knowledge of early Indian art and history. Discuss.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2020]**
16. Pala period is the most significant phase in the history of Buddhism in India, Enumerate.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2020]**
17. Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss.[250 Words] [15 Marks] **[2020]**
18. Persian Literary sources of medieval India reflect the spirit of the age. Comment.[250 Words] [15 Marks] **[2020]**
19. Highlight the Central Asian and Greco-Bactrian elements in the Gandhara art.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2019]**
20. Safeguarding the Indian art heritage is the need of the moment. Discuss.[150 Words][10 Marks] **[2018]**
21. Assess the importance of the accounts of the Chinese and Arab travellers in the reconstruction of the history of India.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2018]**
22. The Bhakti Movement received a remarkable re-orientation with the advent of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Discuss.[250 Words] [15 Marks] **[2018]**
23. How do you justify the view that the level of the excellence of the Gupta numismatic art is not at all noticeable in later times?[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2017]**
24. The spirit of tolerance and love is not only an interesting feature of Indian society from very early times, but it is also playing an important part at the present. Elaborate.[250 Words] [15 Marks] **[2017]**

25. Early Buddhist Stupa-art, while depicting folk motifs and narratives, successfully expounds Buddhist ideals. Elucidate.[200 Words] [12.5 Marks] **[2016]**
26. Krishnadeva Raya, the king of Vijayanagar, was not only an accomplished scholar himself but was also a great patron of learning and literature. Discuss.[200 Words] [12.5 Marks] **[2016]**
27. The ancient civilisation in Indian sub-continent differed from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece in that its culture and traditions have been preserved without a breakdown to present day. Comment.[200 Words] [12.5 Marks] **[2015]**
28. Mesolithic rock cut architecture of India not only reflects the cultural life of the times but also a fine aesthetic sense comparable to modern painting. Critically evaluate this comment.[200 Words] [12.5 Marks] **[2015]**
29. To what extent has the urban planning and culture of the Indus Valley Civilization provided inputs to the present-day urbanization? Discuss.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2014]**
30. Gandhara sculpture owed as much to the Romans as to the Greeks. Explain.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2014]**
31. Taxila university was one of the oldest universities of the world with which were associated a number of renowned learned personalities of different disciplines. Its strategic location caused its fame to flourish, but unlike Nalanda, it is not considered as a university in the modern sense. Discuss.[150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2014]**
32. The third battle of Panipat was fought in 1761. Why were so many empire-shaking battles fought at Panipat? [150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2014]**
33. Sufis and medieval mystic saints failed to modify either the religious ideas and practices or the outward structure of Hindu / Muslim societies to any appreciable extent. Comment. [150 Words] [10 Marks] **[2014]**
34. Though not very useful from the point of view of a connected political history of South India, the Sangam literature portrays the social and economic conditions of its time with remarkable vividness. Comment. [200 Words] [10 Marks] **[2013]**
35. Discuss the Tandava dance as recorded in the early Indian inscriptions. [100 Words] [5 Marks] **[2013]**

36. Chola architecture represents a high watermark in the evolution of temple architecture. Discuss. [100 Words] [5 Marks] **[2013]**

Model Answers

1. Discuss the salient features of the Harappan architecture. (150 words) [2025]

Grid-Based Town Planning and Civic Layout

- **Orthogonal Streets:** Towns were divided into a distinct grid pattern with main streets running North-South and East-West, cutting each other at right angles to optimize wind-induced natural cleaning.
- **Dual Divisibility:** Settlements were typically split into a fortified **Citadel** on the West (for administrative/religious structures) and a larger **Lower Town** on the East (for residential housing).

Structural Engineering and Standardization

- **Standardized Baked Bricks:** Extensive use of kiln-burnt mud bricks with a uniform ratio of 4:2:1 (length, breadth, thickness), ensuring high structural durability against moisture.
- **Functional Domestic Architecture:** Houses faced inner courtyards with windowless street facades to maintain privacy. They included separate bathing platforms, staircases for multi-storied roofs, and individual wells.

Advanced Hydraulic and Sanitary Systems

- **The Great Bath (Mohenjo-daro):** A monumental public pool featuring fine brickwork, a bitumen layer for waterproofing, a changing room complex, and systematic inlet-outlet channels.
- **Subterranean Drainage Net:** Street drains were systematically covered with loose brick tiles or stone slabs for maintenance access, connected directly to house chutes through intermediate soak pits to filter solids.

2. Examine the main aspects of Akbar's religious syncretism. (150 words) [2025]

Philosophical and Theological Exploration

- **Ibadat Khana (House of Worship, 1575):** Originally built for Islamic debates, it was soon expanded into an inter-faith forum welcoming scholars from Hinduism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, and Christianity to explore universal truths.
- **Sulh-i-Kul (Universal Peace):** Enforced as an overarching state ideology, this concept mandated absolute religious tolerance, stating that no state functionary could discriminate based on a subject's faith.

Institutional and Political Reforms

- **Mazhar Nama (Infallibility Decree, 1579):** Positioned the Emperor as the final arbiter in complex theological disputes over conflicting religious interpretations, reducing the political veto power of the orthodox Ulema.
- **Din-i-Ilahi (Tauhid-i-Ilahi):** Introduced an ethical, syncretic moral code blending elements of monotheism, sun worship (Zoroastrian influence), and virtue-based living, centering on loyalty to the crown.

Cultural Integration

- **Translation Bureau (Maktab Khana):** Sponsored the systemic translation of sacred texts like the *Mahabharata* (Razmnama), *Ramayana*, and *Atharvaveda* into Persian to foster cross-cultural empathy among the ruling elite.
- **Abolition of Discriminatory Levies:** Removed the *Jizya* tax on non-Muslims and the Pilgrim Tax, integrating diverse socio-religious groups into the imperial hierarchy.

3. The sculptors filled the Chandella artform with resilient vigor and breadth of life. Elucidate. (150 words) [2025]

Dynamic Kineticism and Anatomy

- **Sinuous Postures:** Chandella sculptors rejected rigid, static forms, employing exaggerated *tribhanga* (triple-bend) postures that infused stone with an illusion of fluid movement and physical rhythm.
- **Anatomical Sophistication:** The human form was carved with intricate sensory detail, emphasizing muscular vitality, voluptuous curves, and soft, natural flesh transitions in hard sandstone.

Celebration of the Manifest World (*Pancashakha*)

- **The Cosmic and Secular Fusion:** Sculptures seamlessly combined divine imagery with everyday reality. Wall friezes depict hunting, military marches, musicians, courtly dances, and domestic tasks, illustrating a holistic view of human existence.
- **Erotic and Tantric Imagery (Mithunas):** On temple exteriors (e.g., Lakshmana, Kandariya Mahadeva), intricate amorous sculptures symbolize the union of *Atman* and *Paramatman*. Rather than appearing crude, they express a deep spiritual celebration of fertility, creation, and existential joy.

Microscopic Ornamental Luxury

- Sculptures show remarkable depth through heavily undercut jewelry, translucent drapery, and highly expressive facial gestures (*bhava*), balancing monumental architectural scale with intimate, living details.

4. Mahatma Jotirao Phule's writings and efforts of social reforms touched issues of almost all subaltern classes. Discuss. [250 words] [2025]

Radical Critique of the Religious Hegemony

- **Deconstruction of Mythologies:** In *Gulamgiri* (Slavery), Phule inverted orthodox Puranic myths, projecting Aryan avatars as conquering colonizers and portraying the lower-caste indigenous population as the rightful, historical rulers of the land.
- **Satyashodhak Samaj (1873):** Established to liberate the Shudras and Ati-Shudras from structural exploitation by priestly intermediaries. He championed ritual-free marriages conducted without Brahmin priests to challenge the religious monopoly.

Emancipation of Women across Caste Lines

- **Pioneering Female Education:** Founded India's first indigenous school for girls at Bhide Wada, Pune (1848), alongside his wife Savitribai Phule, recognizing education as the primary tool to break patriarchal control.
- **Protection Inventions:** Opened the *Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha* (1863) to provide a safe refuge for pregnant, upper-caste Brahmin widows facing social ostracization, actively challenging institutional misogyny.

Championing the Agrarian and Working Classes

- **Peasant Advocacy:** In *Shetkarayacha Asud* (The Whipcord of the Cultivator), he thoroughly detailed how the structural alliance of British revenue systems, local moneylenders, and high-caste bureaucrats drained the peasantry.
- **Labor Welfare:** Advocated for rural development, technical education, and the rights of urban laborers, laying a foundation that directly influenced the modern Indian labor movement.

5. Underline the changes in the field of society and economy from the Rig Vedic to the Later Vedic period. [250 Words] [2024]

Societal Transformations

- **Rigidification of Varna:** The flexible, occupation-based class divisions of the Rig Vedic era solidified into a strict, birth-based four-tier hierarchy (*Chaturvarna*). The upper three classes enjoyed ritual privileges, while the Shudras were relegated to servile roles.
- **Decline in Women's Status:** The high status enjoyed by women in the early period—such as participating in political assemblies (*Sabhas*), access to education, and *Upanayana* rites—declined sharply. Political access was revoked, child marriages emerged, and women were increasingly confined to domestic spheres.
- **Rise of Territorial Identity:** The social unit shifted from tribal, kinship-based loyalties (*Jana*) toward fixed territorial identity and kingdoms (*Janapadas*). Institutional power centralized around the king, backed by elaborate legitimizing sacrifices like *Ashvamedha* and *Ragasuya*.

Economic Transformations

- **Pastoralism to Settled Agriculture:** The pastoral economy centered on cattle-rearing (*Gau*) evolved into a highly settled agrarian economy. Rice (*Vrihi*) and wheat became staple crops alongside the original barley.
- **The Impact of Iron Tech:** The discovery and adoption of iron (*Krishna Ayas*) around 1000 BCE enabled communities to clear the dense forests of the fertile Gangetic plains, dramatically expanding cultivated land.
- **Diversified Crafts and Proto-Urbanization:** Surplus agricultural production sparked specialized crafts like pottery (Painted Grey Ware), leatherwork, metallurgy, and carpentry.
- **Evolving Mediums of Exchange:** While the barter system remained widespread and cattle stayed a prime measure of value, proto-currency units like *Nishka* and *Satamana* began

transitioning from ornamental wear to recognized standards of value, laying the groundwork for early trade networks.