

UPSC Mains Model Questions [June 16-30, 2026]



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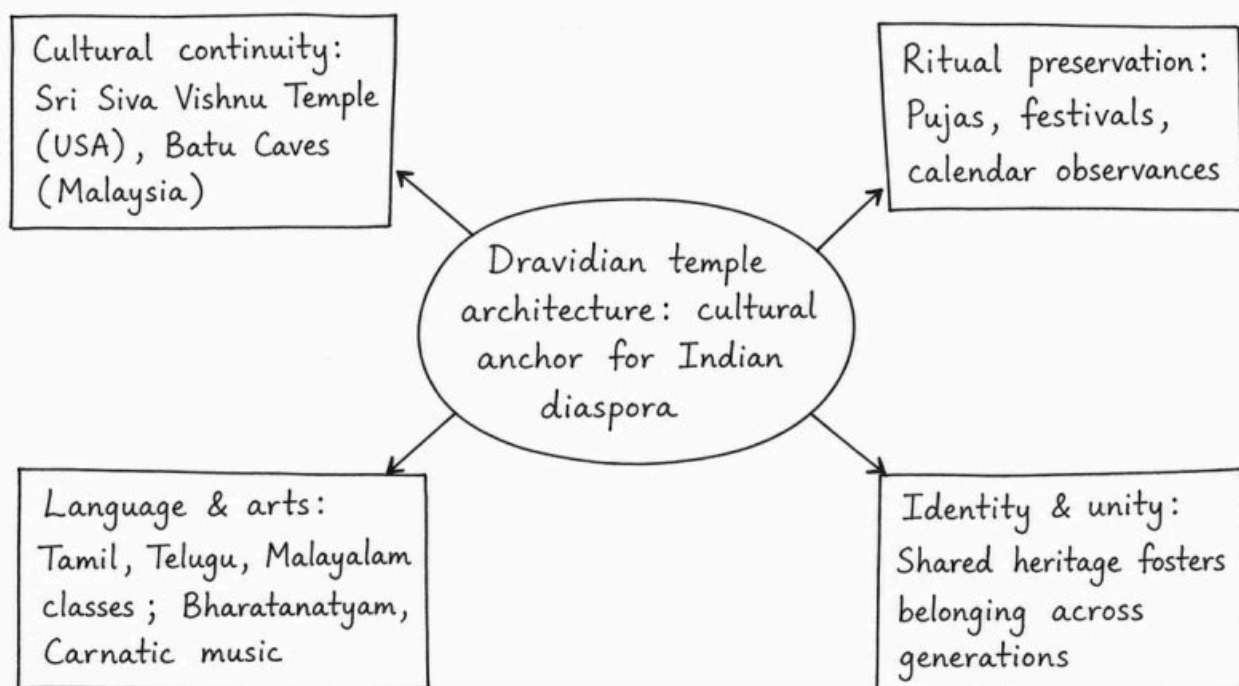
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GS-I: Indian Art, Culture & Heritage

1. With suitable examples, analyze how Dravidian temple architecture became a vital tool of cultural preservation and identity expression for the Indian diaspora globally. (150 words)

Dravidian temple architecture has become a powerful cultural anchor for the Indian diaspora. Its gopurams, vimanas, mantapas and sculpted narratives preserve memory, faith and artistic traditions far beyond India.



- **Cultural continuity:** Temples abroad such as Sri Siva Vishnu Temple, Washington, and Batu Caves, Malaysia, recreate Pallava and Vijayanagara forms, giving migrants a familiar sacred space.
- **Ritual preservation:** Regular pujas, festivals and calendar-based observances keep Hindu practices alive, often adjusted to local work patterns.
- **Language and arts:** Temple halls host Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam classes, along with Bharatanatyam, Carnatic music and religious storytelling for children.
- **Community identity:** They function as meeting points, meal spaces and charity centres, building solidarity and pride among dispersed families.
- **Symbolic visibility:** Grand towers and carvings make diaspora identity publicly visible, asserting belonging without assimilation.

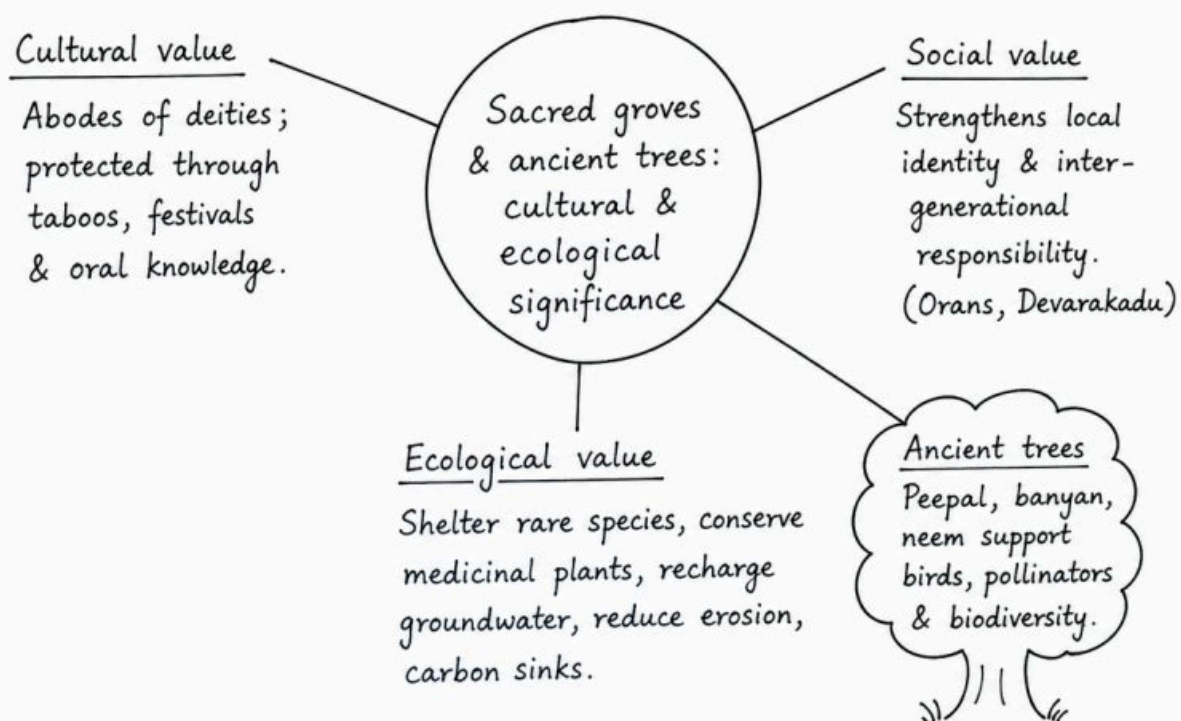
Thus, Dravidian temples are not mere buildings; they are living institutions that preserve heritage, transmit values and express a confident Indian identity in multicultural societies.

Your Notes:



2. Underline the cultural and ecological significance of sacred groves and ancient trees in India. How does scientific dating of natural heritage sites enrich our understanding of historical landscapes? (150 words)

Sacred groves and ancient trees are living archives of India's culture and ecology. They link faith, customary law and community stewardship, while also conserving fragile ecosystems.



- **Cultural value:** They are worshipped as abodes of deities and spirits, and protected through taboos, festivals and oral knowledge.
- **Social value:** Their care strengthens local identity and inter-generational responsibility, from Orans in Rajasthan to Devarakadu in Karnataka.
- **Ecological value:** They shelter rare species, conserve medicinal plants, recharge groundwater, reduce erosion and act as carbon sinks.
- **Ancient trees:** Peepal, banyan and neem support birds, pollinators and seed dispersal, while standing as long-lived witnesses to environmental change.

Scientific dating, through methods such as radiocarbon dating, dendrochronology and OSL, helps fix the age of sediments, wood and landforms. This reveals past climates, vegetation shifts, floods, human land use and the evolution of forests and rivers.

Thus, combining cultural respect with scientific dating turns sacred sites into dated historical landscapes, deepening conservation and heritage planning.

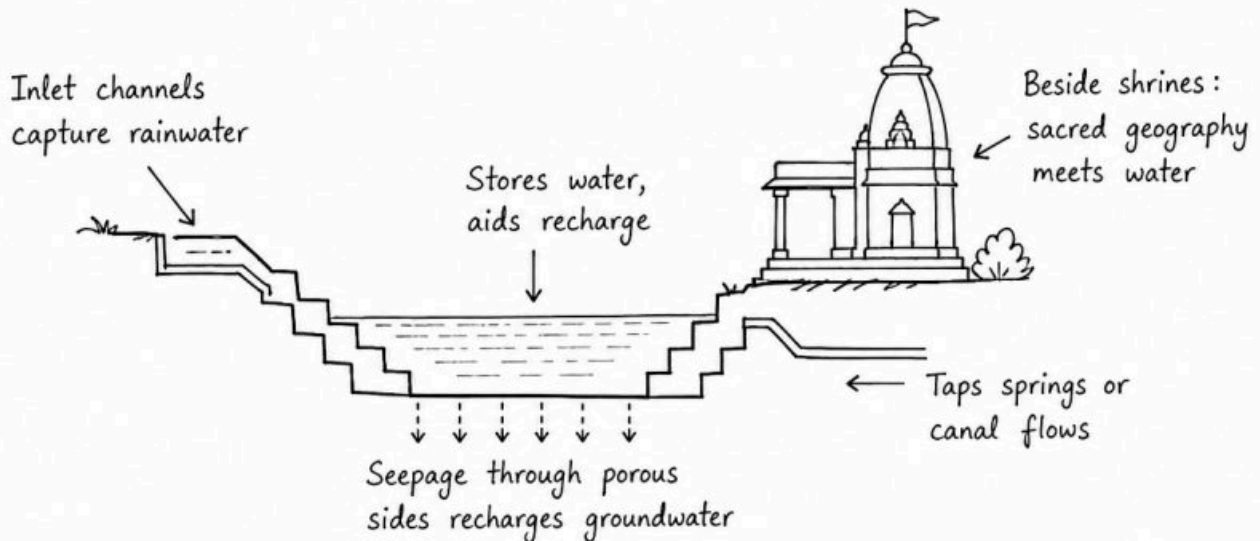
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3. With suitable examples, discuss how traditional water structures like temple Kunds integrated hydraulic engineering with sacred geography. Why are they vital for modern rainwater harvesting? (150 words)

Traditional temple kunds were more than ponds; they were planned water systems that linked faith, landscape and survival. Built beside temples as pushkarini, teppakulam or kalyani, they collected rainwater, stored runoff and often tapped springs or canal flows.

Temple Kunds : Hydraulic Engineering + Sacred Geography



Faith, landscape and survival.

- **Hydraulic design:** stepped masonry, inlet channels and porous sides aided storage, seepage and groundwater recharge. Panna Meena ka Kund shows efficient geometry; Hampi's temple tanks were fed by canals from the Tungabhadra; Krishnabai Temple kund is tied to a sacred spring source.
- **Sacred geography:** their location near shrines made water part of ritual life. Bathing, abishekam and festival use turned the tank into a sacred threshold. Links with deities and pilgrim routes, as in Pushkar and Lolark Kund, deepened social reverence.
- **Modern value:** they offer decentralised, low-cost and climate-resilient models for rainwater harvesting, flood control and aquifer recharge.

Reviving kund-like systems can reduce urban water stress, restore local wells and make water management both community-based and ecologically sound.

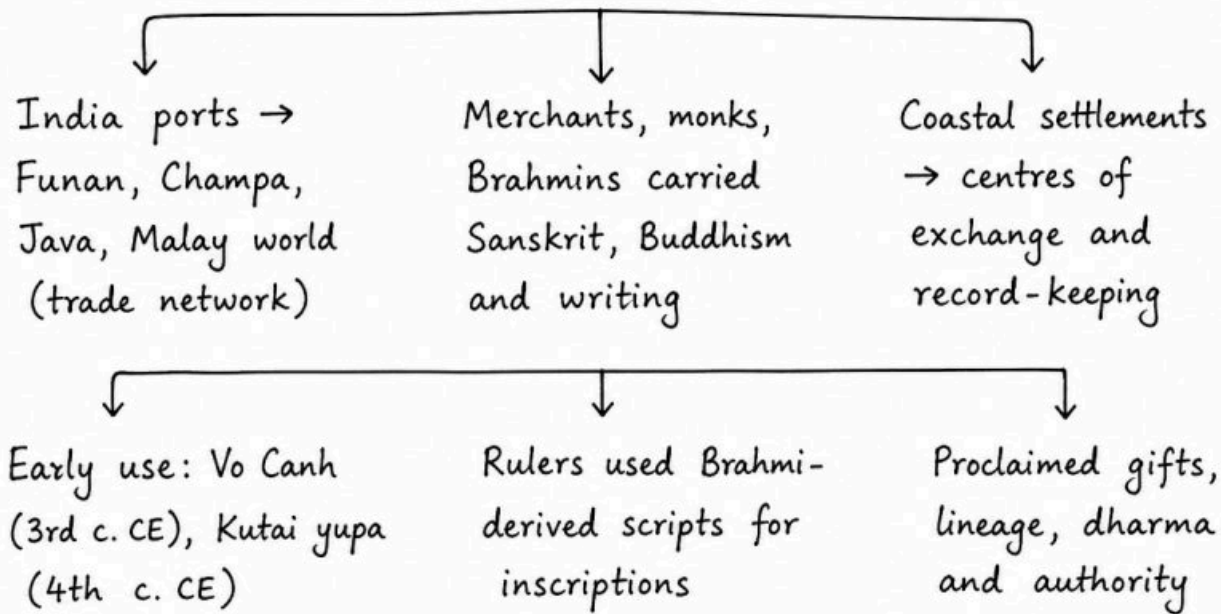
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5. Explain how the Brahmi script migrated along maritime trade routes to shape the early epigraphic traditions of classical Southeast Asian kingdoms. (150 words)

Brahmi did not spread by conquest, but through the long Indian Ocean trade network linking ports in India with Funan, Champa, Java and the Malay world. Merchants, monks and Brahmin scholars carried Sanskrit, Buddhism and writing along these routes, where coastal settlements became centres of exchange and record-keeping.

Brahmi along maritime trade routes



- **Early use:** The script appears in Sanskrit inscriptions such as the 3rd-century CE Vo Canh inscription in Vietnam and the 4th-century CE Kutai yupa inscriptions in Indonesia.
- **Political function:** Local rulers used Brahmi-derived scripts to issue stone and copper inscriptions, proclaiming gifts, lineage and legitimacy.
- **Regional adaptation:** Southern Brahmi, especially Pallava, was reshaped into Khmer, Cham, Kawi, Pyu and Old Mon scripts to suit local sounds.

Thus, maritime contact turned Brahmi into the basis of classical Southeast Asia's epigraphic culture, leaving a durable legacy in later Thai, Lao, Khmer, Javanese and Balinese scripts.

Your Notes: