UPSC Mains Model Questions [November 1-15, 2026]



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3. How did the evolution of ancient epigraphic traditions like the Grantha and Vatteluttu scripts shape regional vernacular literature in southern India? Explain with suitable examples.
4. Explain how the architectural elements of the Indian Stupa evolved into Himalayan Chortens. Why did Buddhist monastic architecture shift from cave-cut Chaityas to free-standing commemorative monuments?
5. Distinguish between the Melakarta system of Carnatic music and the Thaat system of Hindustani music. Why is structural classification vital to classical ragas? Explain.
6. Explain how unique structural features like Ayaka platforms in Krishna River valley stupas distinguished southern Indian Buddhist architecture from northern precedents. Comment.
7. With suitable examples, discuss how ancient Indian astronomers resolved the discrepancy between lunar and solar years using Adhika Masa. Underline the scientific foundations of the lunisolar calendar system.
8. Why is adaptive reuse considered a sustainable paradigm for preserving historical urban architecture? Explain how the principle of reversibility safeguards the material fabric of heritage structures.
9. How do indigenous post-harvest agrarian festivals reflect ecological wisdom and animistic reverence for nature among tribal communities of North-East India? Discuss with suitable examples.
10. With suitable examples, examine how traditional social festivals of North-East India foster kinship networks and preserve intangible cultural heritage amidst modern socio-economic transformations.
11. With suitable examples, discuss how platforms like the Indian Panorama section in national film festivals help preserve regional cultural diversity and foster national integration through cinema.

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12. Discuss in the light of early unrest in garrisons like Ambala and Barrackpore how intelligence failures and religious apprehensions sparked the 1857 Revolt. What were the main triggers?

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13. Point out the strategic significance of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and Gulf of Aden for India's trade. Why have these maritime chokepoints become hotspots for piracy and maritime instability?

GS-I: Indian Society 16

14. Analyse the socio-cultural barriers limiting female participation in non-traditional sports across rural India. How can targeted institutional interventions ensure inclusive youth development and gender parity?
15. Critically examine how matrilineal traditions in North-Eastern tribal societies influence gender roles and property rights. What socio-economic challenges are undermining these traditional arrangements?

GS-II: Polity & Constitution of India 20

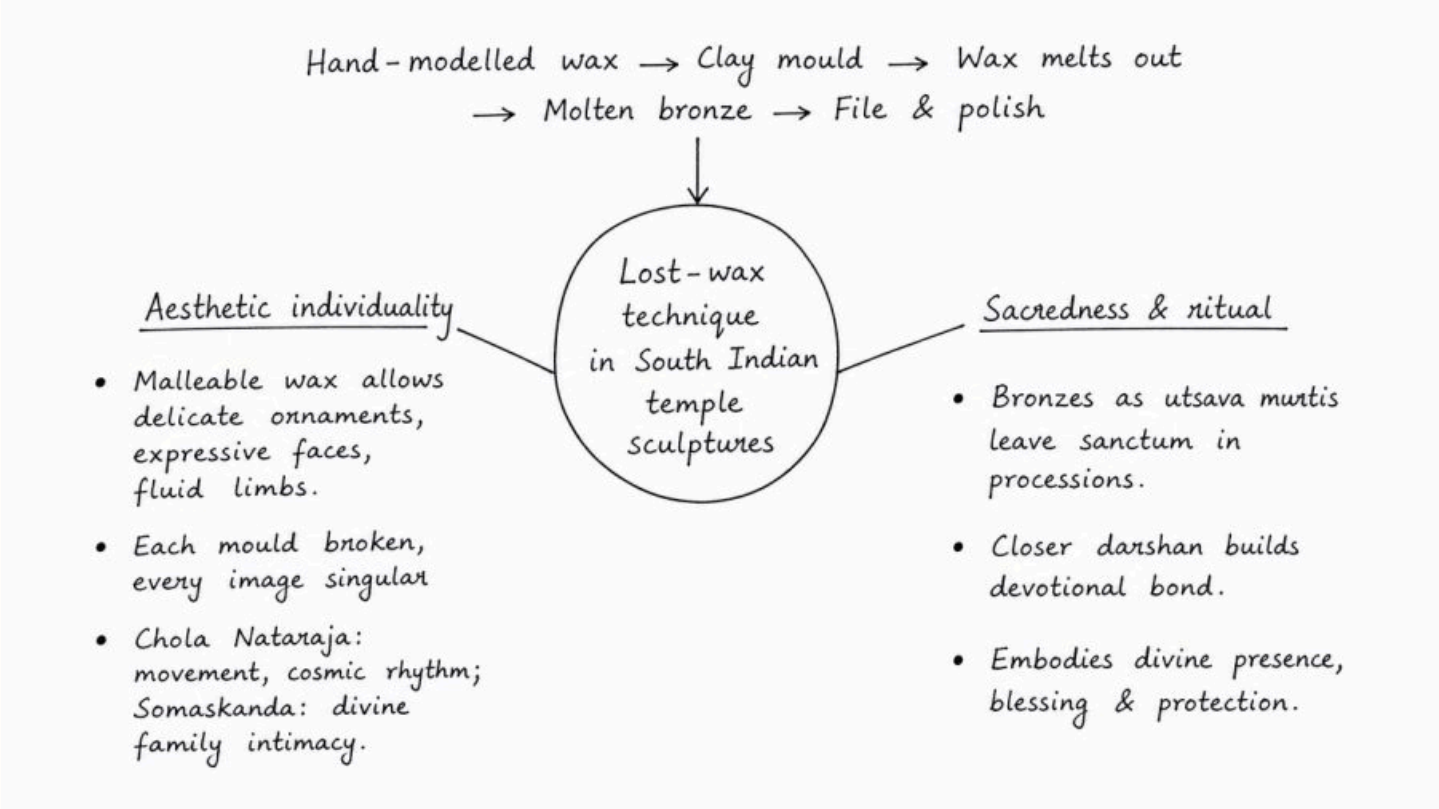
16. Discuss in the light of Article 293, why Union consent is necessary for state borrowings. How does this mechanism preserve macro-economic stability without curtailing state autonomy?
17. Critically analyse how Article 324 ensures the independence of the Election Commission while relying on state executive machinery for electoral roll preparation.
18. Critically analyse how procedural gaps in convening Gram Sabhas under the Forest Rights Act, 2006 compromise the statutory protection guaranteed to indigenous island communities against administrative diversion of forest lands.
19. Why was the introduction of four qualifying dates under the Representation of the People Act, 1950 necessary for youth franchise expansion? Explain with suitable examples.

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GS-I: Indian Art, Culture & Heritage

1. How did the lost-wax (cire-perdue) technique shape the aesthetic individuality and sacredness of South Indian temple sculptures? Explain with suitable examples. (150 words)

Lost-wax casting transforms a hand-modelled wax image into bronze by replacing wax with molten alloy. Because each clay mould is broken, every image is singular, combining prescribed sacred form with an artisan's touch.



Aesthetic individuality

- The wax's malleability permits delicate ornaments, expressive faces and fluid limbs; filing and polishing sharpen details and give bronze its lustre.
- In Chola Nataraja, the lifted leg and balanced ring of flames convey movement and cosmic rhythm; Somaskanda presents divine family intimacy.

Sacredness and ritual

- Portable bronzes, or utsava murtis, leave the sanctum in processions and bring the deity into public life. Consecration makes them divine embodiments, not simply artworks.
- Panchaloha alloys and durable metal sustain ritual use across generations, while royal patronage reinforced devotion and authority.

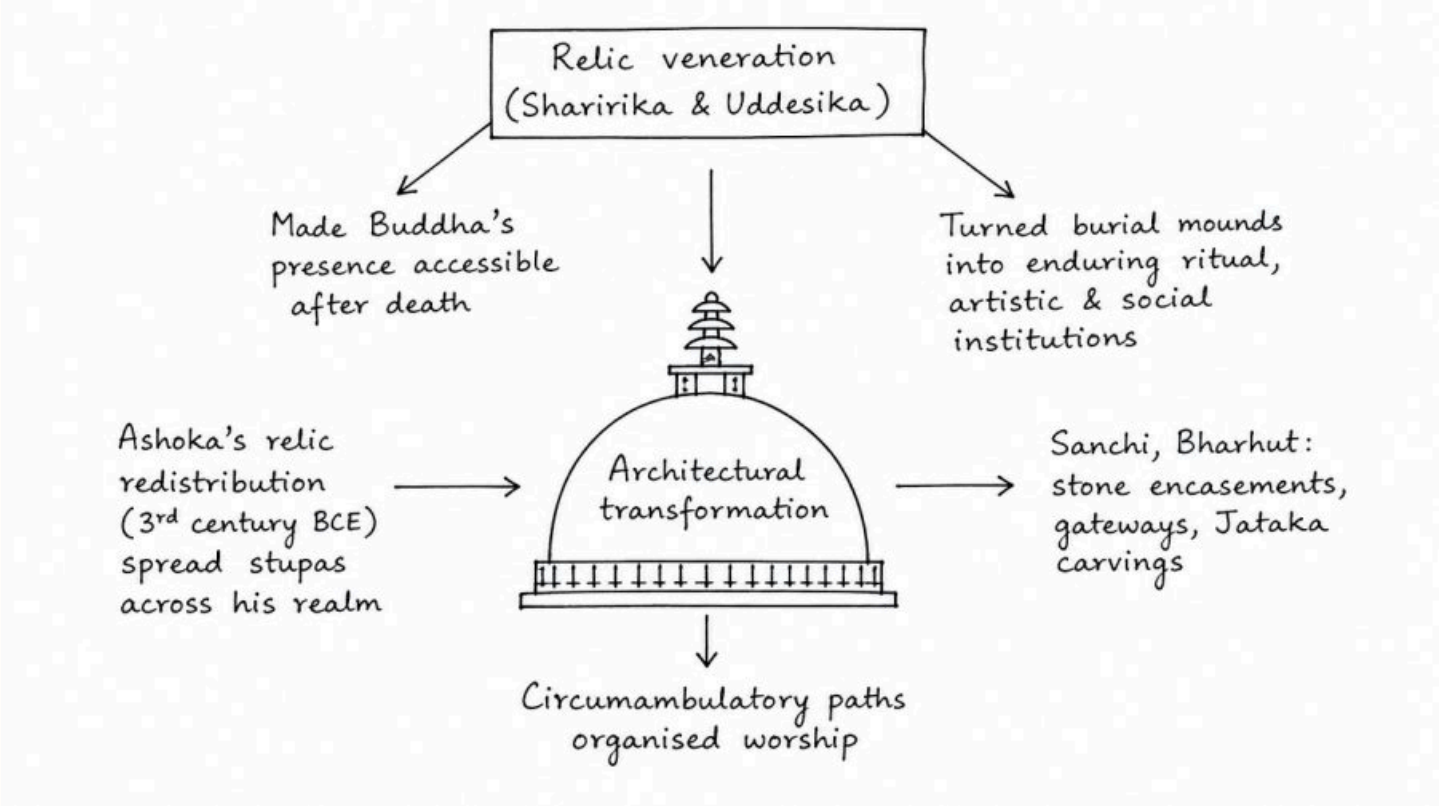
Thus, the technique joined precision, craftsmanship and worship: Nataraja is distinctive artwork and mobile sacred presence. Its sanctity, however, rests on consecration and continuing ritual, not casting alone.

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2. Explain how the tradition of relic veneration (Sharirika and Uddesika) transformed early Buddhist stupas into major centers of architectural innovation and socio-religious integration in ancient India. (150 words)

Sharirika relics—cremated remains such as bones and ashes—and Uddesika objects or symbols commemorating the Buddha made his presence accessible after death. Their veneration turned burial mounds into enduring ritual, artistic and social institutions. **Architectural transformation**



- Early stupas enshrined corporeal relics; Ashoka's third-century BCE redistribution encouraged construction across his realm. The hemispherical anda, terrace, railing, harmika and umbrella gave the mound a cosmic form. Circumambulatory paths organised worship. Later stone encasements, gateways and Jataka carvings, as at Sanchi and Bharhut, joined engineering with visual teaching. Uddesika symbols, including the Bodhi tree and Dharma wheel, focused devotion; later images enriched these complexes.

Socio-religious integration

- Pilgrimage brought monks, merchants, women, rulers and local devotees together. Inscriptions record donations, making stupas shared projects beyond royal patronage. Merit-making, storytelling and festivals linked lay and monastic communities; monasteries and halls supported teaching and hospitality. Pilgrim traffic stimulated trade and cultural exchange.

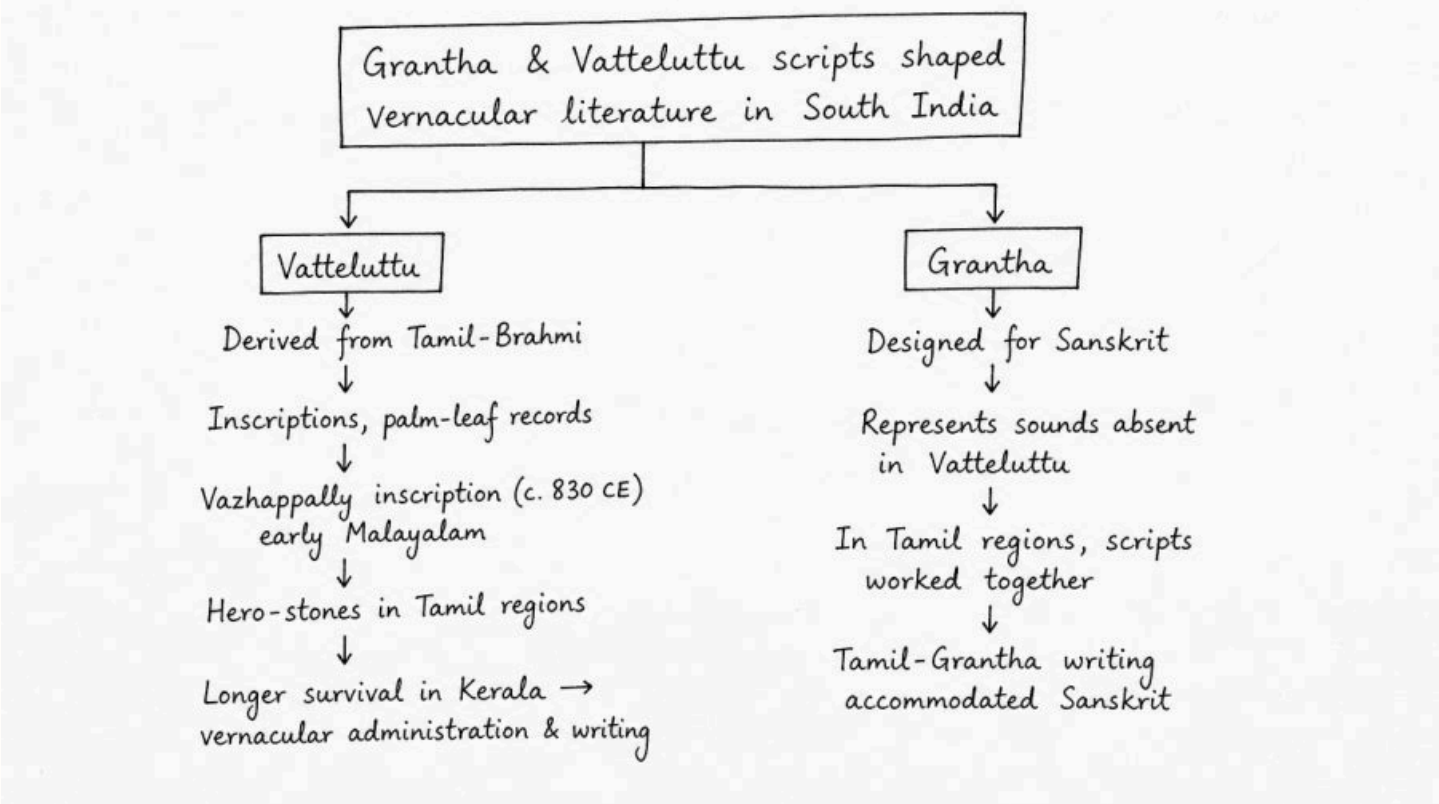
Yet hierarchies persisted alongside integration.

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3. How did the evolution of ancient epigraphic traditions like the Grantha and Vatteluttu scripts shape regional vernacular literature in southern India? Explain with suitable examples. (150 words)

Scripts shaped more than record-keeping: they governed how local speech and learned languages entered writing. In southern India, Grantha and Vatteluttu helped define Tamil and Malayalam literary traditions.



- **Vatteluttu:** Derived from Tamil-Brahmi, it served inscriptions and palm-leaf records. The Vazhappally inscription (c. 830 CE) illustrates its use in early Malayalam, while Tamil hero-stones preserve its use in Tamil regions. Its longer survival in Kerala supported vernacular administration and writing.
- **Grantha:** Designed for Sanskrit, it represented sounds absent from Vatteluttu. In Tamil regions, the scripts worked together: Tamil-Grantha writing accommodated Sanskrit terms, while Manipravalam blended Tamil and Sanskrit in literature. Pallava temple inscriptions exemplify this coexistence; Grantha also influenced Tamil spelling and script forms.
- **Malayalam:** In Kerala, synthesis produced Arya Ezhuthu and helped form its script, able to represent Dravidian speech and Sanskrit-derived vocabulary.

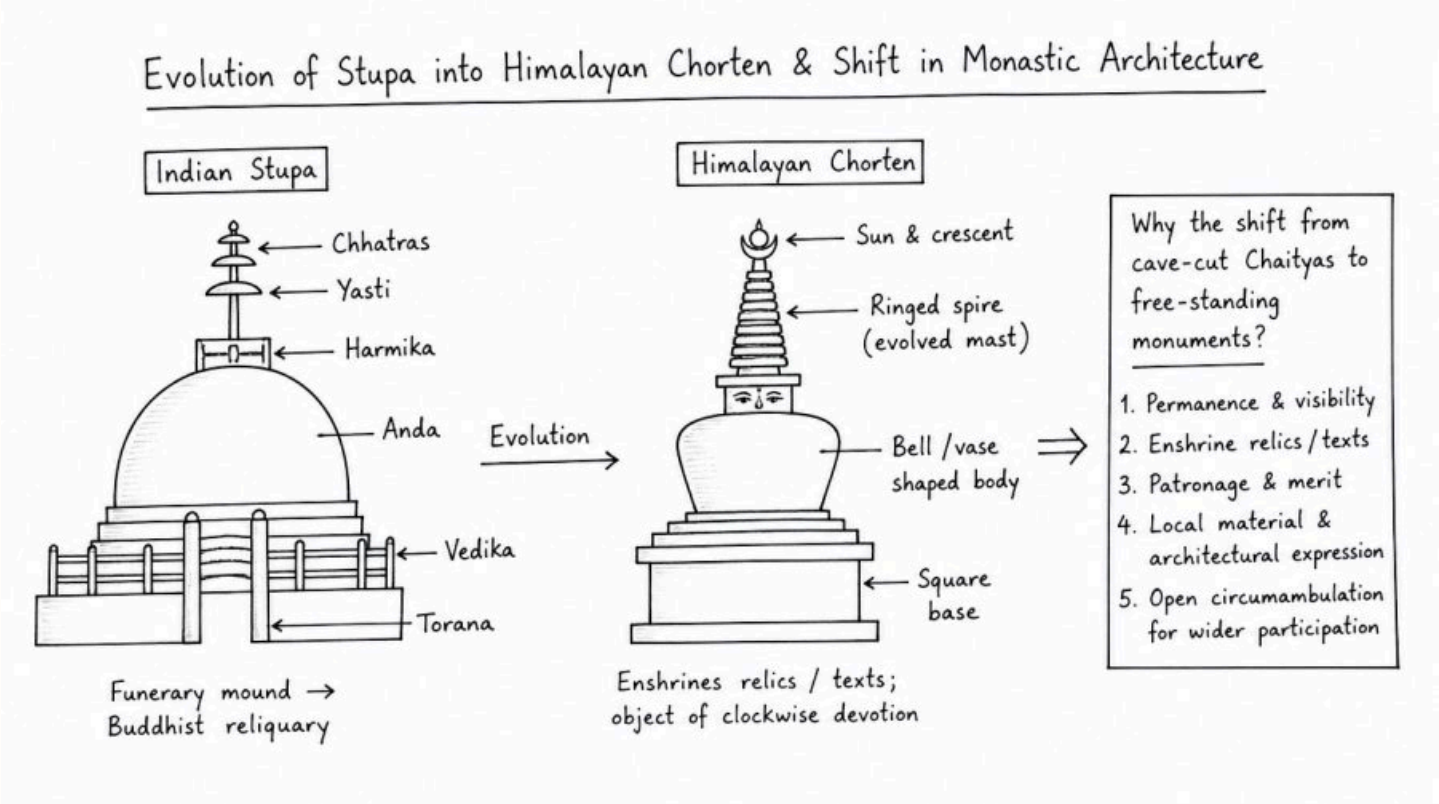
Thus, these scripts widened literary possibilities but also reflected Sanskrit's influence on regional languages over time, especially in scholarship and worship.

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4. Explain how the architectural elements of the Indian Stupa evolved into Himalayan Chortens. Why did Buddhist monastic architecture shift from cave-cut Chaityas to free-standing commemorative monuments? (150 words)

The stupa evolved from a funerary mound into a Buddhist reliquary. Its Himalayan adaptation retained symbolism while reflecting local forms and practices.



Architectural evolution

- Indian stupas combined the anda (dome), harmika (square railing), yasti (mast) and chhatras (umbrellas), with a vedika for circumambulation and carved toranas.
- Himalayan chortens reshaped the dome into a bell- or vase-like body on a square base; the mast became a ringed spire, often crowned by sun and crescent. They enshrine relics or texts and remain objects of clockwise devotion.

Why the shift

- Rock-cut Chaityas offered communal worship around a stupa, but required suitable rock and were hard to expand. Larger monasteries and growing pilgrim communities needed accessible spaces for teaching, worship and relics. Brick-and-stone building, wider Buddhist expansion and royal and lay patronage enabled durable monuments across varied landscapes.

Both forms endured: caves served monastic worship, while chortens made sacred memory visible across Himalayan routes.

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