UPSC Mains Model Questions [October 16-31, 2026]



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3. Critically examine how underwater archaeology has transformed our understanding of ancient Indian maritime trade networks. What are the major challenges in preserving submerged cultural heritage in coastal regions?
4. Point out the historical significance of rock petroglyphs in Trans-Himalayan trade routes. How do these engravings help reconstruct ancient cultural interactions between Central and South Asia?
5. Commercial appropriation of traditional folk music often fails to deliver economic equity to grassroots practitioners. Discuss in the light of Intellectual Property Rights frameworks in India.
6. With suitable examples, discuss why ancient Sanskrit theatre forms like Koodiyattam struggle for survival today. How does institutional recognition help in safeguarding such intangible cultural heritage?
7. How do traditional musical narrative forms like Villu Paattu serve as vehicles for community memory and moral instruction in regional folklore? Critically discuss with suitable examples.
8. Examine why the safeguarding of living intangible cultural heritage requires shifting from centralized conservation to community-led documentation. Suggest suitable measures for protecting indigenous folk traditions.
9. How did ancient Silk Road routes facilitate civilisational and Buddhist exchanges between India and Central Asia? Discuss in the light of preserving shared cultural heritage.
10. Examine the architectural significance of early brick temples in post-Gupta India. How did regional traditions like Dakshina Kosala contribute to the evolution of temple structural engineering?
11. Critically examine why state-sponsored cultural institutions like the Lalit Kala Akademi were established post-independence. How have they reshaped the public patronage of visual arts in India?
12. Point out how the transition from Sangam heroic poetry to post-Sangam didactic literature reflected shifting socio-moral values in ancient South India. Discuss with suitable examples.
13. How do living folk traditions differ from codified classical art forms in their transmission and community roots? Critically discuss the challenges in preserving oral cultural heritage in India.
14. How do traditional water harvesting structures like 'Ahar-Pynes' and 'Eris' demonstrate climate resilience? Critically examine their relevance in modern decentralised groundwater management.
15. How did the structural evolution of Stupas and Chaityas reflect the socio-religious transformations in early Deccan Buddhism? Discuss with suitable examples.

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16. Point out the role of early women leaders like Anasuya Sarabhai in organizing textile labor in India. How did their unique methods shape the Gandhian approach to industrial relations?
17. Explain the role of C. Natesa Mudaliar and the Communal Government Orders in shaping early affirmative action. How did these historical measures influence post-independence reservation policies?

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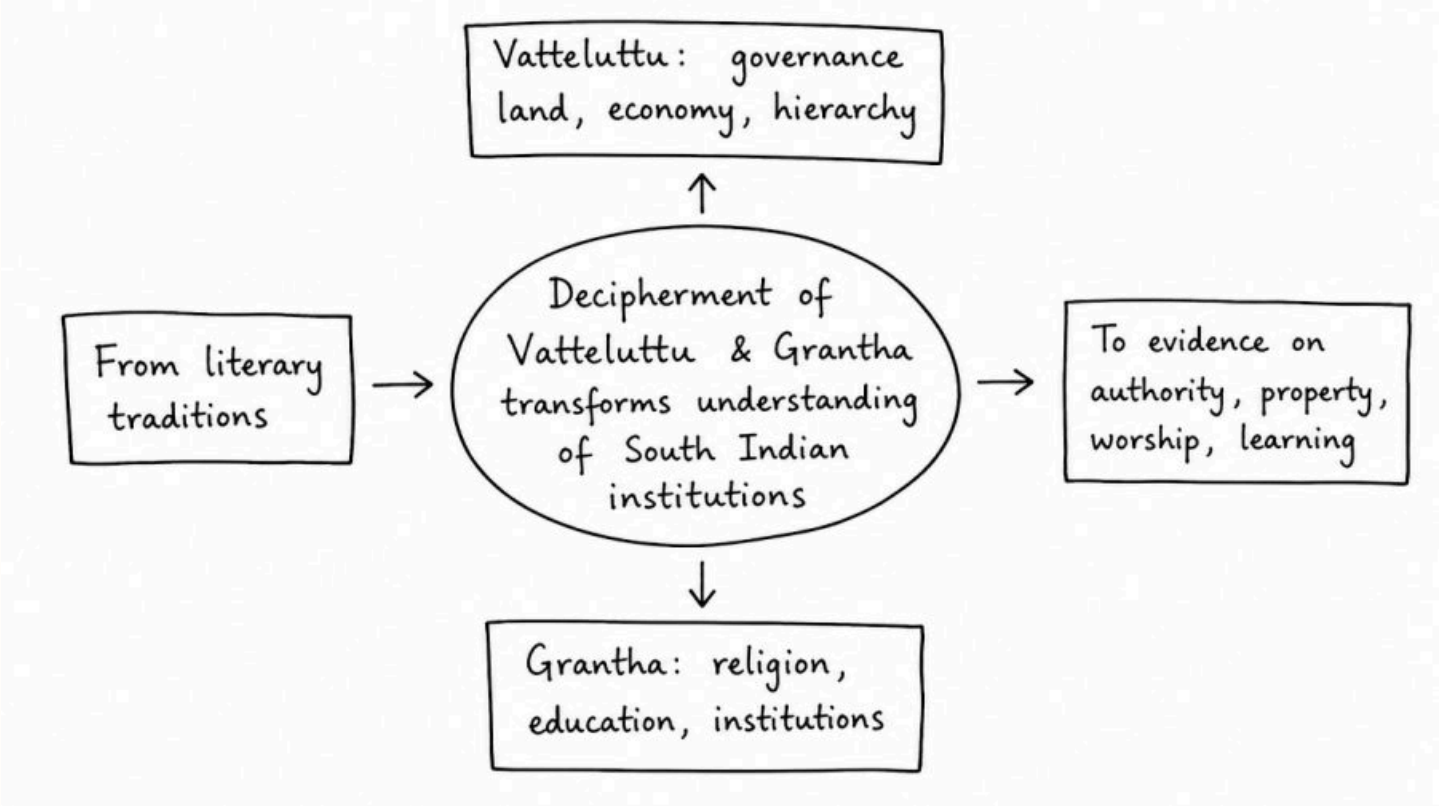
18. Critically analyse why vertical slum rehabilitation projects often lead to spatial segregation and social dislocation. How can informal economic networks be preserved during urban redevelopment?
19. Critically analyse how the proliferation of home-based subcontracted work affects women's social mobility in India. Why does this labor remain structurally invisible in mainstream development planning?
20. How did the tectonic evolution of Gondwana basins influence the distribution of coal resources in India? Discuss in the light of their potential for unconventional gas extraction.

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GS-I: Indian Art, Culture & Heritage

1. Examine how the decipherment of regional ancient scripts like Vatteluttu and Grantha has transformed our understanding of South Indian socio-economic institutions. (150 words)

Decipherment of Vatteluttu and Grantha inscriptions has opened a direct window into South India's institutions. These records complement literary traditions with evidence of authority, property, worship and learning. **Vatteluttu: governance and material life**



- Inscriptions record royal orders, local administration, land transfers and temple endowments under Chera, Pandya and Chola rulers. They clarify how authority operated and how property rights were documented.
- Such evidence helps reconstruct agrarian production, ownership and the movement of wealth. It also exposes hierarchy through control of land and gifts, though inscriptions privilege elites and reveal little about labourers.

Grantha: religion and knowledge

- Grantha preserved Sanskrit religious, philosophical and literary works. Its use alongside Tamil demonstrates bilingual scholarship and cultural exchange, while temple records reveal institutions as centres of worship, education, patronage and economic activity.

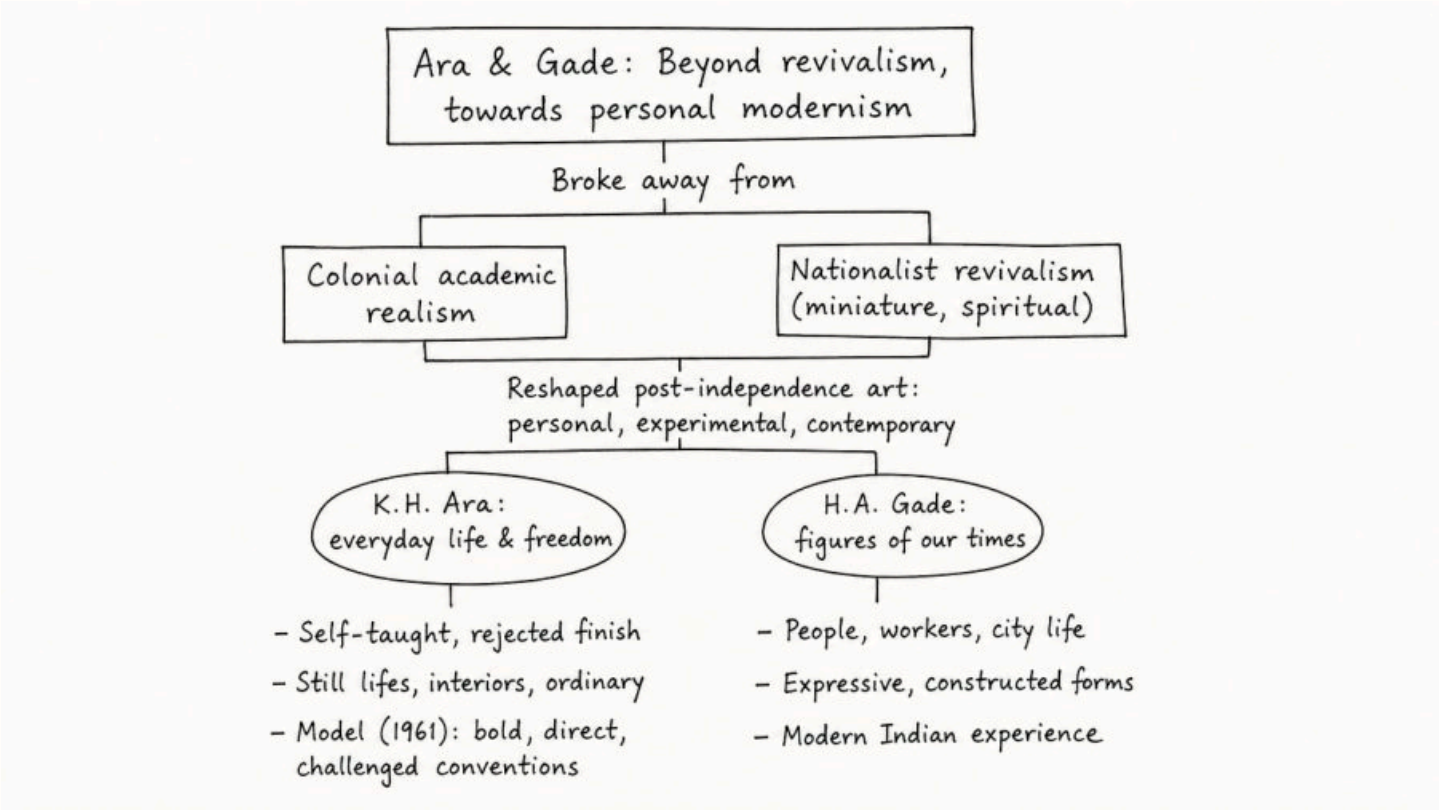
Together, decipherment grounds reconstruction in primary evidence and shows interconnected institutions; yet inscriptional records remain uneven, requiring cautious interpretation alongside archaeological evidence.

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2. How did lesser-known modernists like K.H. Ara and H.A. Gade break away from nationalist academic revivalism to reshape post-independence Indian art? Discuss with suitable examples. (150 words)

After independence, modern Indian artists sought to challenge colonial academic realism and the nationalist revivalism that looked to miniature traditions and spiritualised themes. K.H. Ara and H.A. Gade helped make modernism personal, experimental and rooted in contemporary experience rather than a national style. **Ara: everyday life and freedom**



- Self-taught, Ara rejected academic finish and revivalist idealisation. His still lifes and domestic interiors made ordinary subjects worthy of serious art.
- In works such as Model (1961), unidealised female nudes, bold colour and direct brushwork challenged social censorship and conventions of respectable subject matter.

Gade: landscape as abstraction

- Gade turned landscape into a modernist experiment: geometric structures, intense colour and palette-knife texture displaced descriptive naturalism.
- His "houses without people" and abstract views of Indian places translated changing environments into autonomous compositions, not nationalist illustrations.

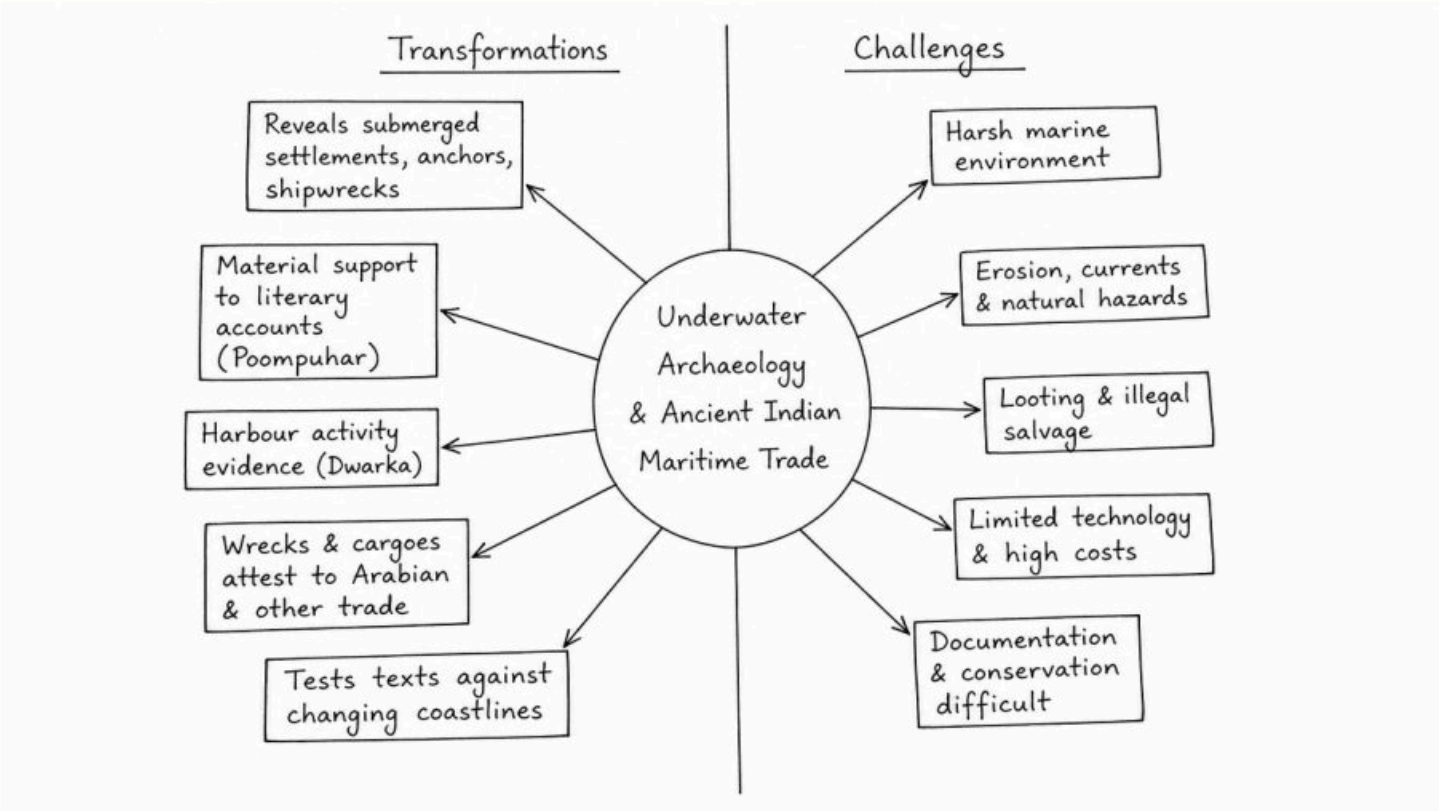
Together, they widened artistic freedom while retaining Indian subjects, helping establish plural, non-prescriptive modern art in India.

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3. Critically examine how underwater archaeology has transformed our understanding of ancient Indian maritime trade networks. What are the major challenges in preserving submerged cultural heritage in coastal regions? (250 words)

Underwater archaeology has moved Indian maritime history beyond literary references. By examining submerged settlements, anchors, cargoes and shipwrecks, it reveals coastal economies and sea routes, while exposing the limits of fragmentary evidence. **Historical evidence** Finds off Poompuhar, including submerged structural remains and anchors, lend material support to accounts of a Chola-era port and its Bay of Bengal connections. Dwarka explorations have identified stone anchors and structures, indicating harbour activity; they do not by themselves establish a legendary identification. Evidence tests texts against changing coastlines. Wrecks and cargoes attest to Arabian Sea and West Asian exchange; finds at Arikamedu and Harappan ports, though largely land-based, corroborate wider Indo-Roman and Gulf commerce. **What it changes** Underwater evidence restores Indian sailors and merchants as intermediaries, rather than depicting trade as foreign-led. Hull remains illuminate vessel construction and navigation. Yet isolated finds cannot alone prove regular routes, exact trading partners or uninterrupted urban continuity; dating, provenance and comparison with excavated ports are essential. They reveal links between ports and inland markets. **Preservation challenges** Submerged sites face corrosion, bioerosion, currents, storms and shifting sediments; warming seas, coastal erosion and development intensify damage. Dredging, anchoring, fishing, tourism and illicit salvage can destroy context that makes artefacts historically meaningful. India also confronts high survey and conservation costs, costly technology, scarce funding, limited specialist capacity and uneven coordination among archaeological, coastal and maritime authorities. Fragmented laws leave jurisdiction and enforcement unclear. A stronger framework should prioritise inventories, impact assessments, in-situ protection, trained teams and community reporting, while integrating heritage into coastal planning and climate adaptation.

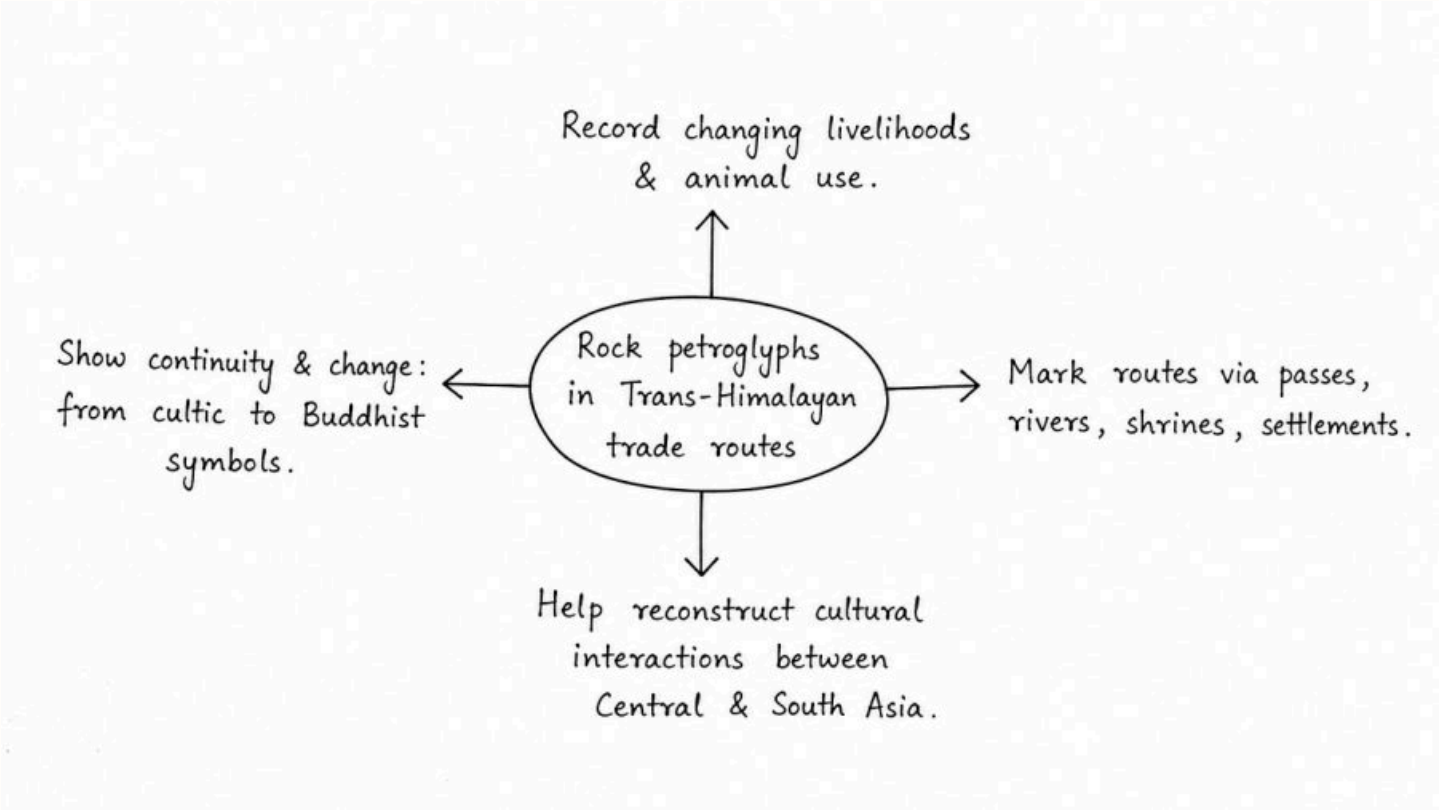


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4. Point out the historical significance of rock petroglyphs in Trans-Himalayan trade routes. How do these engravings help reconstruct ancient cultural interactions between Central and South Asia? (150 words)

Rock petroglyphs across Ladakh, Spiti, Mustang and western Tibet are more than prehistoric art. They preserve evidence of movement and exchange across Himalayan corridors where written records are limited. **Historical significance**



- Petroglyphs record changing livelihoods, from hunting and animal use to pastoralism, and depict ibex, horses, camels, warriors and routeside worship. Their locations near passes, rivers, shrines and settlements identify pathways used by traders, pilgrims and migrants. Different carving styles and successive symbols—from older cultic imagery to Buddhist stupas, vajras and swastikas—show continuity and change over centuries.

Reconstructing interaction

- Shared motifs across Ladakh, Tibet and Central Asia suggest contact, while horses, camels and inscriptions reveal mobility and linguistic diversity. Buddhist stupas and symbols trace religious transmission from South Asia into Tibet. Read with archaeological and genetic evidence, these images help map migration and cultural blending.

Conservation must protect these fragile sites from development, weathering, neglect and unregulated tourism.

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