

NCERT Class XII History

THEME 4

Thinkers, Beliefs and Buildings

Cultural Developments (c. 600 BCE – 600 CE)

CBSE BOARD + UPSC PRACTICE WORKBOOK

50 MCQs • 20 Fill in the Blanks • 20 One-Word / One-Sentence Answers

20 Frequently Asked Questions (50 words) • 20 Long Essay Answers

Easy British English • Natural Teacher Language • Exam-Ready

SECTION A — Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) [50 Questions]**Instructions**

Each question has four options (a), (b), (c), (d). The correct answer is shown in bold after each question. For UPSC-style practice, try to answer first, then check. CBSE board carries 1 mark each.

Q1. Which site is the major focus of Theme 4 (Thinkers, Beliefs and Buildings) in NCERT Class XII History?

- (a) Amaravati
- (b) Taxila
- (c) Sanchi
- (d) Bodh Gaya

Ans.

(c) Sanchi — the stupa complex at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, is the central focus of this chapter.

Q2. Who were the begums of Bhopal who provided money for the preservation of Sanchi?

- (a) Razia Sultana and Nur Jahan
- (b) Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum
- (c) Mumtaz Mahal and Zebunnissa
- (d) Chand Bibi and Durgavati

Ans.

(b) Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum of Bhopal funded the preservation, the museum, and John Marshall's publications.

Q3. The stupa at Sanchi was 'discovered' (by Europeans) in which year?

- (a) 1796
- (b) 1818
- (c) 1854
- (d) 1914

Ans.

(b) 1818 — when three of its four gateways were still standing.

Q4. Who visited Amaravati in 1854 and collected sculpture panels now called the 'Elliot Marbles'?

- (a) James Fergusson
- (b) Alexander Cunningham
- (c) Walter Elliot
- (d) H.H. Cole

Ans.

(c) Walter Elliot, Commissioner of Guntur, visited Amaravati in 1854.

Q5. Who was appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments in 1880 and advocated in situ preservation?

- (a) John Marshall
- (b) H.H. Cole
- (c) James Fergusson
- (d) Alexander Cunningham

Ans.

(b) H.H. Cole — he wrote that it was 'suicidal and indefensible' to allow the country to be looted.

Q6. Sanchi was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in which year?

- (a) 1955
- (b) 1976
- (c) 1989
- (d) 2001

Ans.

(c) 1989.

Q7. Which country's scholars first wanted to take away the eastern gateway of Sanchi?

- (a) British
- (b) French
- (c) German
- (d) Italian

Ans.

(b) The French wanted to take the eastern gateway to display in a museum in France.

Q8. The mid-first millennium BCE is regarded as a turning point because:

- (a) The Mauryan Empire was founded
- (b) Thinkers like Mahavira, Buddha, Socrates and Plato emerged
- (c) The Gupta period began
- (d) The Vedas were compiled

Ans.

(b) Thinkers across the world — Zarathustra, Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Mahavira, Buddha — all emerged in this period.

Q9. The kutogarashala was:

- (a) A Buddhist stupa
- (b) A Jain temple
- (c) A hut with a pointed roof where travelling mendicants halted
- (d) A royal palace

Ans.

(c) A kutogarashala was where travelling teachers stopped and held debates with each other and with laypersons.

Q10. Buddhist texts mention how many sects or schools of thought debating in the mid-first millennium BCE?

- (a) 16
- (b) 32
- (c) 64
- (d) 108

Ans.

(c) 64 sects or schools of thought are mentioned in Buddhist texts.

Q11. According to Jain tradition, Mahavira was preceded by how many other tirthankaras?

- (a) 12
- (b) 23
- (c) 24
- (d) 32

Ans.

(b) 23 tirthankaras preceded Mahavira according to Jain tradition.

Q12. The most important idea in Jainism is:

- (a) Non-attachment to the Vedas
- (b) The entire world is animated — ahimsa is central
- (c) God is the creator of the universe
- (d) Devotion (bhakti) leads to liberation

Ans.

(b) The entire world is animated (even stones and rocks have life) — hence ahimsa (non-violence) is the central principle.

Q13. How many vows do Jain monks and nuns take?

- (a) Three
- (b) Four
- (c) Five
- (d) Eight

Ans.

(c) Five vows: non-killing, non-lying, non-stealing, celibacy, and non-possession.

Q14. In Jainism, the cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped by:

- (a) God's will
- (b) Karma
- (c) Bhakti
- (d) Prayer

Ans.

(b) Karma — actions determine future existence. Asceticism and penance break the karma chain.

Q15. Jain texts known as the Uttaradhyayana Sutta describe which queen trying to persuade her husband to renounce the world?

- (a) Draupadi
- (b) Kamalavati
- (c) Prabhavati
- (d) Yashodhara

Ans.

(b) Queen Kamalavati tried to persuade her husband to renounce the world in this Jain text.

Q16. What was the Buddha's original name?

- (a) Vardhamana
- (b) Ananda
- (c) Siddhartha Gautama
- (d) Ajatasattu

Ans.

(c) Siddhartha Gautama — he was the son of a chief of the Sakya clan.

Q17. The three sights that disturbed Siddhartha Gautama during his journey were:

- (a) A beggar, a priest, and a fire
- (b) An old man, a sick man, and a corpse
- (c) A monk, a river, and a tree
- (d) A king, a soldier, and a battle

Ans.

(b) An old man, a sick man, and a corpse — these made him realise the inevitability of suffering.

Q18. Where did the Buddha deliver his first sermon?

- (a) Lumbini
- (b) Bodh Gaya
- (c) Sarnath
- (d) Kusinagara

Ans.

(c) Sarnath — this first sermon is represented by the wheel (dharmachakra) symbol.

Q19. Which Pali word means 'transience' in Buddhist philosophy?

- (a) Dukkha
- (b) Anatta
- (c) Anicca
- (d) Nibbana

Ans.

(c) Anicca — the world is transient and constantly changing.

Q20. Which Pali word means 'soullessness' — there is nothing permanent or eternal in the world?

- (a) Anicca
- (b) Anatta
- (c) Dukkha
- (d) Metta

Ans.

(b) Anatta — the concept of soullessness in Buddhist philosophy.

Q21. In earliest Buddhism, the existence of God was:

- (a) Central to all teachings
- (b) Irrelevant
- (c) Denied completely
- (d) Affirmed as Brahman

Ans.

(b) Irrelevant — whether or not god existed was considered irrelevant in earliest Buddhism.

Q22. The Sutta Pitaka contains:

- (a) Monastic rules for monks and nuns
- (b) The Buddha's teachings
- (c) Philosophical and abstract matters
- (d) Stories of the Buddha's past lives

Ans.

(b) The Sutta Pitaka contains the Buddha's teachings.

Q23. The organisation of monks founded by the Buddha was called:

- (a) Sangha
- (b) Gotra
- (c) Sabhas
- (d) Samiti

Ans.

(a) Sangha — the community of monks who became teachers of dhamma.

Q24. Buddhist monks who lived on alms were called:

- (a) Theris
- (b) Bhikkhus
- (c) Gahapatis
- (d) Tirthankaras

Ans.

(b) Bhikkhus (male monks). Female monks were called bhikkhunis.

Q25. Who was the first woman to be ordained as a bhikkhuni?

- (a) Therigatha
- (b) Punna
- (c) Mahapajapati Gotami
- (d) Dhanavati

Ans.

(c) Mahapajapati Gotami, the Buddha's foster mother — admitted through Ananda's mediation.

Q26. The Therigatha is:

- (a) A collection of verses by male monks
- (b) A collection of verses by bhikkhunis (female monks)
- (c) A text on monastic rules
- (d) A biography of the Buddha

Ans.

(b) The Therigatha is a unique Buddhist text — part of the Sutta Pitaka — consisting of verses composed by bhikkhunis.

Q27. Punna, in the Therigatha, was described as a:

- (a) Queen
- (b) Brahmin lady
- (c) Dasi (slave woman)
- (d) Merchant's daughter

Ans.

(c) Dasi (slave woman) who went to the river each morning to fetch water for her master's household.

Q28. The Vinaya Pitaka contains:

- (a) The Buddha's teachings
- (b) Stories of Jataka
- (c) Rules and regulations for monks and nuns
- (d) Philosophical discussions

Ans.

- (c) Rules and regulations for those who joined the sangha.

Q29. What does the word 'chaitya' possibly derive from?

- (a) The Sanskrit word for 'great'
- (b) The word 'chita' meaning a funeral pyre
- (c) The name of a Jain tirthankara
- (d) A Pali word for a river

Ans.

- (b) Chaitya may derive from 'chita' meaning a funeral pyre, and by extension a funerary mound.

Q30. According to the Ashokavadana, who distributed portions of the Buddha's relics to every important town?

- (a) Chandragupta Maurya
- (b) Harsha
- (c) Asoka
- (d) Kanishka

Ans.

- (c) Asoka — and ordered the construction of stupas over them.

Q31. Which part of the stupa is described as a 'balcony-like structure representing the abode of the gods'?

- (a) Anda
- (b) Yashti
- (c) Harmika
- (d) Vedika

Ans.

- (c) Harmika — it sits atop the anda (dome) and represents the abode of the gods.

Q32. What is the vedika of a stupa?

- (a) The dome
- (b) The stone railing surrounding the mound
- (c) The umbrella on top
- (d) The gateway

Ans.

- (b) The vedika is the stone railing that resembles an ancient bamboo or wooden fence.

Q33. The gateways of a stupa are called:

- (a) Shikhara
- (b) Torana
- (c) Chhatri
- (d) Mandapa

Ans.

- (b) Torana — richly carved gateways at the four cardinal points.

Q34. Worshippers entering a stupa walked around it in which direction?

- (a) Anti-clockwise
- (b) Clockwise, imitating the sun's course
- (c) Left to right only
- (d) No specific direction

Ans.

- (b) Clockwise — imitating the sun's course through the sky.

Q35. Early Buddhist sculptors did NOT depict the Buddha in human form. Instead, they used:

- (a) Lotus flowers only
- (b) Symbols such as empty seat, stupa, wheel, and bodhi tree
- (c) Greek-style statues
- (d) Only inscriptions

Ans.

- (b) Symbols — empty seat for meditation, stupa for mahaparinibbana, wheel for first sermon, bodhi tree for enlightenment.

Q36. The Wheel (Dharmachakra) in Buddhist sculpture represents:

- (a) The Buddha's enlightenment
- (b) The Buddha's birth
- (c) The first sermon at Sarnath
- (d) The Buddha's death

Ans.

(c) The first sermon at Sarnath, delivered after the Buddha attained enlightenment.

Q37. The motif of a woman whose touch caused trees to flower and bear fruit is known as:

- (a) Gajashalabhanjika
- (b) Shalabhanjika
- (c) Therigatha motif
- (d) Gajalakshmi

Ans.

(b) Shalabhanjika — a pre-Buddhist popular tradition integrated into Buddhist art at Sanchi.

Q38. James Fergusson, the earliest modern art historian, concluded that Sanchi was a centre of:

- (a) Vaishnavism
- (b) Shaivism
- (c) Tree and serpent worship
- (d) Goddess cults

Ans.

(c) Tree and serpent worship — because he had not read Buddhist literature and judged only from the images.

Q39. The paintings at Ajanta caves are on:

- (a) Stone panels
- (b) Bronze plaques
- (c) Walls of caves
- (d) Palm leaves

Ans.

(c) Walls of caves — depicting Jataka stories, courtly life, processions, etc.

Q40. The new way of thinking in Buddhism (c. 1st century CE) that regarded the Buddha as a saviour is called:

- (a) Theravada
- (b) Hinayana
- (c) Mahayana
- (d) Vajrayana

Ans.

(c) Mahayana — literally 'great vehicle'. It developed the concept of the Bodhisatta.

Q41. What did followers of the older Buddhist tradition call THEMSELVES?

- (a) Hinayana
- (b) Theravada
- (c) Mahayana
- (d) Vajrayana

Ans.

(b) Theravada — those who followed the path of old, respected teachers (theras). The term 'Hinayana' was used by Mahayana supporters.

Q42. A Bodhisatta is:

- (a) A Buddhist text
- (b) A form of the stupa
- (c) A deeply compassionate being who helps others attain liberation
- (d) A type of Jain temple

Ans.

(c) A Bodhisatta — in Mahayana Buddhism — is a being who accumulates merit but uses it to help others, not just to attain nibbana for themselves.

Q43. In Vaishnavism, the bond between the devotee and god was visualised as one of:

- (a) Fear and respect
- (b) Love and devotion (bhakti)
- (c) Ritual sacrifice
- (d) Philosophical debate

Ans.

(b) Love and devotion (bhakti) — the concept that grew strongly in Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

Q44. How many avatars (incarnations) of Vishnu were recognised in Vaishnavism?

- (a) Five
- (b) Seven
- (c) Ten
- (d) Twelve

Ans.

(c) Ten avatars — different forms the deity was believed to assume in order to save the world from evil forces.

Q45. Shiva was primarily symbolised in art by the:

- (a) Lotus
- (b) Wheel
- (c) Linga
- (d) Peacock

Ans.

(c) Linga — although Shiva was occasionally represented in human form too.

Q46. The inner sanctum of an early Hindu temple where the deity's image was placed is called:

- (a) Shikhara
- (b) Mandapa
- (c) Garbhagriha
- (d) Torana

Ans.

(c) Garbhagriha — literally 'womb chamber'; a small square room with a single doorway.

Q47. The tall tower built over the garbhagriha of a temple is known as the:

- (a) Torana
- (b) Shikhara
- (c) Harmika
- (d) Vedika

Ans.

(b) Shikhara — it gradually grew taller in later temple architecture.

Q48. The Barabar caves (Bihar) were built on the orders of Asoka for members of which sect?

- (a) Buddhist bhikkhus
- (b) Jain monks
- (c) Ajivika sect
- (d) Vedic priests

Ans.

(c) The Ajivika sect — the earliest cave tradition in India.

Q49. The Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora is remarkable because:

- (a) It is the oldest temple in India
- (b) It is carved from a single piece of rock
- (c) It was built by Asoka
- (d) It houses the largest linga in India

Ans.

(b) Carved entirely from a single piece of rock in the 8th century CE. A copperplate inscription records the sculptor's amazement.

Q50. The rock-cut sculptural panel at Mahabalipuram (Tamil Nadu) is debated by art historians as depicting:

- (a) The Battle of Kurukshetra
- (b) Either the descent of the Ganga from heaven OR Arjuna doing penance (Mahabharata)
- (c) The life of Mahavira
- (d) The Ramayana story of Sita's rescue

Ans.

(b) Art historians are sharply divided — some see the descent of the Ganga, others see Arjuna doing penance from the Mahabharata.

SECTION B — Fill in the Blanks [20 Questions]**Instructions**

Fill in each blank with the correct word or phrase. Answers are given below each question in bold.

Q1. The stupa at Sanchi is located near the city of _____ in Madhya Pradesh.

Ans. Bhopal (about 20 miles north-east of Bhopal)

Q2. The rulers of Bhopal — _____ and _____ — funded the preservation of Sanchi.

Ans. Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum

Q3. Walter Elliot collected sculpture panels from Amaravati in 1854; these panels came to be called the _____.

Ans. Elliot Marbles

Q4. H.H. Cole advocated that original works of art should be preserved _____ — that is, on the spot where they were found.

Ans. in situ

Q5. The most important idea in Jainism is that the entire world is animated, and therefore _____ (non-violence) is central.

Ans. ahimsa

Q6. According to Jain tradition, Mahavira was preceded by _____ other tirthankaras.

Ans. 23

Q7. The Buddha's original name was _____.

Ans. Siddhartha Gautama

Q8. The three sights that disturbed Siddhartha were an old man, a sick man, and a _____.

Ans. corpse

Q9. The Buddha delivered his first sermon at _____, and this event is symbolised by the wheel (dharmachakra).

Ans. Sarnath

Q10. The Pali word _____ means 'sorrow' — it is intrinsic to human existence in Buddhist philosophy.

Ans. dukkha

Q11. The organisation of monks founded by the Buddha is called the _____.

Ans. sangha

Q12. Buddhist male monks who lived on alms were called _____.

Ans. bhikkhus

Q13. The Therigatha is a collection of verses composed by _____ (female monks).

Ans. bhikkhunis

Q14. The word 'chaitya' may be derived from 'chita', meaning a _____ — and by extension a funerary mound.

Ans. funeral pyre

Q15. The dome of a stupa is called the _____; the balcony-like structure above it is called the _____.

Ans. anda; harmika

Q16. The richly carved gateways of a stupa at the four cardinal points are called _____.

Ans. toranas

Q17. In Mahayana Buddhism, the new way of thinking regarded the Buddha as a _____ figure who could ensure salvation.

Ans. saviour

Q18. In Vaishnavism, the bond between devotee and god was visualised as _____ — love and devotion.

Ans. bhakti

Q19. The inner sanctum of an early Hindu temple, where the deity's image was kept, is called the _____.

Ans. garbhagriha

Q20. The Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora is famous because the entire structure is carved out of a _____ piece of rock.

Ans. single

SECTION C — One-Word or One-Sentence Answers [20 Questions]

Instructions

Answer each question in one word or one sentence only. These are excellent for quick revision and CBSE 1-mark questions.

Q1. Name the Sanskrit/Pali word for the 'three baskets' of Buddhist literature.

Ans. Tipitaka (or Tripitaka).

Q2. What is the term for a biography of a saint or religious leader?

Ans. Hagiography.

Q3. Who was the first woman to be ordained as a bhikkhuni in Buddhism?

Ans. Mahapajapati Gotami (the Buddha's foster mother).

Q4. What is the Pali term for the concept of 'soullessness' in Buddhist philosophy?

Ans. Anatta.

Q5. Name the Vinaya Pitaka — in one sentence, what does it contain?

Ans. It contains rules and regulations for those who joined the sangha (monks and nuns).

Q6. Which sect were the Barabar caves (Bihar) built for, on the orders of Asoka?

Ans. The Ajivika sect.

Q7. What is the inner sanctum of a Hindu temple called?

Ans. Garbhagriha.

Q8. Name the motif of a woman whose touch caused trees to flower — found at Sanchi.

Ans. Shalabhanjika.

Q9. In what century CE was the Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora carved?

Ans. The 8th century CE.

Q10. What does 'in situ' mean in the context of heritage preservation?

Ans. It means preserving artefacts on the spot where they were found, rather than removing them.

Q11. Name the archaeologist who published Bhilsa Topes (one of the earliest works on Sanchi) in 1854.

Ans. Alexander Cunningham.

Q12. What is the name of the tall tower built over the central shrine of a Hindu temple?

Ans. Shikhara.

Q13. What does the empty seat symbol represent in early Buddhist sculpture?

Ans. The meditation of the Buddha.

Q14. What does the wheel (dharmachakra) represent in Buddhist sculpture?

Ans. The Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath.

Q15. Name the Jain text in which Queen Kamalavati tries to persuade her husband to renounce the world.

Ans. The Uttaradhyayana Sutta.

Q16. In Buddhist thought, what does 'dukkha' mean?

Ans. Dukkha means sorrow — it is intrinsic to human existence.

Q17. Who were the 'theris' in Buddhism?

Ans. Theris were respected women bhikkhunis (female monks) who had attained liberation.

Q18. What is the Pali word 'anicca' used to describe?

Ans. Anicca means transience — the world is transient and constantly changing.

Q19. Sanchi was declared a World Heritage Site in which year?

Ans. 1989.

Q20. What is the vedika of a stupa?

Ans. The vedika is the stone railing surrounding the mound of the stupa.

SECTION D — Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) [20 Questions, ~50 Words Each]

Instructions

These are the most commonly asked 2-mark and 3-mark questions in CBSE board exams and UPSC Prelims/Mains GS-I. Each answer is approximately 50 words — crisp, clear, and to the point. Perfect for quick revision!

Q1. What is a stupa and why was it built?

Ans. A stupa is a mound built over the relics of the Buddha or other revered teachers. Stupas originated from a pre-Buddhist tradition of regarding certain natural sites as sacred. They became important in Buddhism because they contained relics regarded as sacred — emblems of both the Buddha and Buddhism. Asoka built many stupas across the subcontinent.

Q2. What was the role of the sangha in Buddhism?

Ans. The sangha was the community of monks (bhikkhus) and nuns (bhikkhunis) founded by the Buddha. They became teachers of dhamma (righteous living). The sangha accepted people from all social groups — wealthy men, craftspeople, even slaves — and treated them as equals. It functioned democratically through discussion and consensus, voting when consensus failed.

Q3. Why did Sanchi survive while Amaravati did not?

Ans. Sanchi survived because scholars realised the value of in situ preservation before it was too late. The begums of Bhopal also funded its preservation. Amaravati was dismantled because officials kept removing sculpture to European museums. H.H. Cole protested against this policy but could not save Amaravati, which is now largely destroyed.

Q4. What are the central teachings of the Buddha?

Ans. The Buddha taught that the world is transient (anicca), soulless (anatta), and full of sorrow (dukkha). He advocated a middle path — between severe penance and self-indulgence. He emphasised individual agency, compassion (karuna), and fellow feeling (metta). He regarded the social world as a human creation, not divinely ordained, so it could be transformed.

Q5. What is Mahayana Buddhism? How does it differ from the older tradition?

Ans. Mahayana Buddhism, which developed around the 1st century CE, regarded the Buddha as a saviour figure who could ensure salvation. It also developed the concept of the Bodhisatta — a compassionate being who uses accumulated merit to help others attain liberation. The older tradition, called Theravada by its own followers, regarded the Buddha as a human being who attained enlightenment through his own efforts.

Q6. What is bhakti and how did it develop in Vaishnavism and Shaivism?

Ans. Bhakti means devotion and love between a devotee and a chosen deity. In Vaishnavism, cults developed around Vishnu's ten avatars — forms assumed to save the world from evil forces. In Shaivism, Shiva was worshipped through the linga and in human form. Bhakti emphasised a personal, emotional bond with the god rather than ritual sacrifice.

Q7. Why did women join the Buddhist sangha?

Ans. Women joined the sangha for spiritual liberation and social equality. In Brahmanical society, women had limited opportunities for education and spiritual achievement. The sangha allowed women to become bhikkhunis, achieve high learning (like knowledge of the Tipitaka), and become theris — respected teachers of dhamma. The Therigatha shows women like Punna (a slave woman) achieving spiritual independence and challenging social norms.

Q8. What are the five vows of Jainism?

Ans. Jain monks and nuns take five vows: (1) Ahimsa — non-killing; (2) Satya — non-lying; (3) Asteya — non-stealing; (4) Brahmacharya — celibacy; (5) Aparigraha — non-possession of property. These vows reflect the central Jain belief that monastic existence and renunciation of worldly things are necessary conditions for liberation from the cycle of karma.

Q9. What were the Puranas and who were they written for?

Ans. The Puranas were texts compiled by Brahmanas around the middle of the first millennium CE. They contained stories about gods and goddesses, composed in simple Sanskrit verse so they could be read aloud to everyone — including women and Shudras who did not have access to Vedic learning. They spread the ideas of Vaishnavism and Shaivism widely across Indian society.

Q10. What do early Buddhist sculptures at Sanchi depict?

Ans. Early Buddhist sculptures at Sanchi depict Jataka tales (stories from the Buddha's previous lives), symbols representing the Buddha (empty seat, wheel, bodhi tree, stupa), popular motifs like the shalabhanjika and serpent worship, and animal scenes. They do not show the Buddha in human form. The sculptures were also inspired by pre-Buddhist popular traditions integrated into Buddhist art.

Q11. What is the garbhagriha and how did temple architecture evolve?

Ans. The garbhagriha is the inner sanctum of a Hindu temple — a small square room with a single doorway for the worshipper to enter and worship the deity's image. Over time, a tall shikhara was built above it. Later temples added assembly halls, large gateways, and arrangements for water supply. Some temples were also carved from living rock, like the Kailashnatha at Ellora.

Q12. What is the significance of the Therigatha?

Ans. The Therigatha is a unique Buddhist text — part of the Sutta Pitaka — consisting of verses composed by bhikkhunis (female monks). It gives us an insight into women's social and spiritual experiences. It includes compositions by Punna, a slave woman, who challenged a Brahmana's belief in ritual bathing. It shows that Buddhism offered women spiritual equality and the opportunity to attain liberation.

Q13. Who were the fatalists and materialists of the mid-first millennium BCE?

Ans. The Ajivikas (like Makkhali Gosala) were fatalists — they believed everything is predetermined; neither effort nor karma can change one's destiny. The Lokayatas or Charvakas (like Ajita Kesakambali) were materialists — they denied the soul, afterlife, and any merit in gifts or sacrifices. Human beings dissolved into four elements at death, with nothing surviving.

Q14. What is the Vinaya Pitaka? Give two examples of its rules.

Ans. The Vinaya Pitaka is one of the three baskets (Tipitaka) of Buddhist literature, containing rules and regulations for those who joined the sangha. Example 1: When a bhikkhu makes a new blanket/rug, he must keep it for at least six years before getting a new one. Example 2: A bhikkhu at a family residence may accept a maximum of two or three bowlfuls of food.

Q15. How were stupas funded and built?

Ans. Stupas were funded by a wide range of donors. Inscriptions record donations from kings (the Satavahanas), from guilds (ivory workers funded a gateway at Sanchi), from hundreds of ordinary women and men who mentioned their names and occupations, and from bhikkhus and bhikkhunis. This shows stupa-building was a community enterprise involving people from all social groups.

Q16. What is the difference between the Sutta Pitaka and Abhidhamma Pitaka?

Ans. The Sutta Pitaka contains the Buddha's teachings — stories and discourses narrated in the language of ordinary people. The Abhidhamma Pitaka deals with philosophical and abstract matters. Both are part of the Tipitaka (Three Baskets). The Vinaya Pitaka, the third basket, contains monastic rules. Together, they form the complete canon of Theravada Buddhist literature.

Q17. What was the significance of the mid-first millennium BCE globally?

Ans. The mid-first millennium BCE is regarded as a turning point in world history. It saw the emergence of great thinkers across the world: Zarathustra in Iran, Confucius in China, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Greece, and Mahavira and the Buddha in India. This was also a time when new kingdoms and cities were developing and economic life was changing in the Ganga valley.

Q18. How did Buddhism appeal to people from different backgrounds?

Ans. Buddhism grew rapidly because it appealed to people dissatisfied with existing religious practices and confused by rapid social changes. It emphasised values of metta (fellow feeling) and karuna (compassion), especially for the younger and weaker. The Buddha regarded the social world as a human creation — not divinely ordained — suggesting that social relations could be transformed. People from all social groups were welcomed into the sangha.

Q19. What is the problem of 'text and image not matching' in art history?

Ans. Art historians often draw on textual traditions to understand the meaning of sculptures. But this is not always easy. A famous example is the rock-cut panel at Mahabalipuram — some historians see the descent of the Ganga based on the Puranas; others see Arjuna doing penance from the Mahabharata. The same sculpture can support multiple readings, so text and image do not always give a single answer.

Q20. What does the NCERT mean when it says the monuments are 'just the tip of the iceberg'?

Ans. The NCERT points out that many religious beliefs, rituals, and practices were not recorded in permanent visible forms — as monuments, sculptures, or paintings. Many communities did not feel the need to keep lasting records. Daily practices and occasional religious activities were far more widespread than what survives in stone. The spectacular monuments we study represent only a tiny fraction of the rich religious life of ancient India.

SECTION E — Long Questions and Answers [20 Questions, 150–300 Words Each]

Instructions

These long questions are designed for CBSE 5-mark / 8-mark answers and UPSC Mains GS-I. The language is simple, clear, and natural — like a teacher explaining to students. Each answer is structured with an Introduction, key points, and a Conclusion.

Q1. Describe the significance of Sanchi as a historical site. Why was it important to preserve it?

Ans.

Introduction: Sanchi is one of the most important Buddhist sites in the world, located on a small hill in Madhya Pradesh, about 20 miles north-east of Bhopal.

Historical Significance: The site contains stupas, gateways (toranas), and sculptures built over a period of nearly a thousand years (3rd century BCE to the 12th century CE). The inscriptions on the railings and pillars record the names of hundreds of donors — from kings to ordinary workers — giving us a vivid picture of early Indian society. The sculptures depict Jataka tales, symbols of the Buddha, and popular traditions, making Sanchi a visual encyclopaedia of early Indian religious and social life.

Why Preservation Was Important: The discovery of Sanchi in 1818 transformed our understanding of early Buddhism. John Marshall's publications on Sanchi (1914 onwards) became landmark works in Indian art history. Sultan Jehan Begum of Bhopal provided the funds for the museum, the guesthouse where Marshall worked, and the publication of his volumes. Without this wise patronage, Sanchi might have been dismantled like Amaravati.

The contrast with Amaravati makes the point clearly. Amaravati — one of the largest and most magnificent stupas ever built — was essentially destroyed because its sculptures were taken away piece by piece to European museums. Sanchi survives because both the begums of Bhopal and later the Archaeological Survey of India chose to preserve it in situ.

Conclusion: Sanchi was declared a World Heritage Site in 1989, recognising its Outstanding Universal Value. It stands today as a testament to the wisdom of those — Indian and foreign — who chose preservation over plunder.

Q2. Discuss the background of philosophical thought in India in the mid-first millennium BCE. What new questions were being asked?

Ans.

Introduction: The mid-first millennium BCE was a remarkable period in world history. Across different civilisations — from Greece to China to India — great thinkers emerged who tried to

understand the world and the meaning of human existence.

The Sacrificial Tradition: In India, this period began with the dominance of the Vedic sacrificial tradition. The Rigveda (c. 1500–1000 BCE) contained hymns to deities like Agni, Indra, and Soma, and sacrifices (yajnas) were the primary form of religious practice. Initially collective, these sacrifices later became private rituals performed by household heads. More elaborate sacrifices — like the Rajasuya and Ashvamedha — required Brahmin priests and were conducted for kings.

New Questions: By the 6th century BCE, the Upanishads posed new philosophical questions: What is the nature of the self (atman)? What is the ultimate reality (Brahman)? Is rebirth real? What causes suffering? Can liberation (moksha) be attained through knowledge rather than ritual?

Other Voices: At the same time, teachers of various other traditions — fatalists (Ajivikas) and materialists (Lokayatas or Charvakas) — offered completely different answers. Buddhist texts mention as many as 64 sects debating each other in kutogarashalas (huts where mendicants halted). Teachers travelled from place to place, trying to convince ordinary people and laypersons of the validity of their philosophy.

The Challenge to Brahmanical Authority: Mahavira and the Buddha both questioned the authority of the Vedas and the caste-based social order. They emphasised individual agency — that men and women could attain liberation through their own efforts, regardless of birth.

Conclusion: This intellectual ferment produced some of the most enduring philosophical traditions in world history — Buddhism, Jainism, and the philosophical schools of Hinduism.

Q3. Write a detailed account of the central teachings of Jainism.

Ans.

Introduction: Jainism is one of the oldest philosophical traditions in India. While Vardhamana Mahavira (6th century BCE) is often regarded as its founder, Jain tradition holds that he was preceded by 23 other tirthankaras — literally, 'those who guide men and women across the river of existence.'

The Animated World: The most important idea in Jainism is that the entire world is animated — even stones, rocks, water, fire, and earth have life. This means that any action that harms living beings is wrong. Non-injury to living beings (ahimsa) is therefore the supreme principle of Jainism.

Karma and Liberation: The cycle of birth and rebirth is shaped through karma — the consequences of one's actions. According to Jainism, it is possible to free oneself from this cycle only through renouncing the world and observing strict penance and asceticism. Monastic existence is a necessary condition of salvation in Jainism.

The Five Vows: Jain monks and nuns take five vows: (1) Ahimsa — non-killing; (2) Satya — non-lying; (3) Asteya — non-stealing; (4) Brahmacharya — celibacy; (5) Aparigraha — non-possession of property.

No Role for God: Jainism does not believe in a creator god. Liberation can only come through one's own effort. No divine grace or intervention can save a person. This makes Jainism a tradition that emphasises individual moral responsibility.

Spread of Jainism: Jainism spread gradually across India. Jain scholars produced literature in Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Tamil. Manuscripts were carefully preserved in libraries attached to temples. Some of the earliest stone sculptures associated with religious traditions are images of Jain tirthankaras.

Conclusion: Jainism's emphasis on ahimsa has had a profound impact on Indian thinking as a whole — influencing even figures like Mahatma Gandhi in the modern period.

Q4. Describe the life of the Buddha and explain how he attained enlightenment.

Ans.

Introduction: The Buddha — 'the Enlightened One' — is one of the most influential teachers in world history. His message spread from India across Central Asia, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Sri Lanka.

Early Life: Siddhartha Gautama was born as the son of a chief of the Sakya clan (c. 6th century BCE). He had a sheltered upbringing within a palace, insulated from the harsh realities of life. One day, he persuaded his charioteer to take him into the city. There he saw, for the first time, three sights that deeply disturbed him: an old man, a sick man, and a corpse. He realised that the decay and destruction of the human body was inevitable.

The Search for Truth: Shaken by these sights, Siddhartha left the palace and set out in search of his own truth. He tried various paths — including severe bodily mortification — which led him to the brink of death. He abandoned these extreme methods and chose the Middle Path — a path of moderation between extreme penance and self-indulgence.

Enlightenment: After several days of deep meditation under a tree, Siddhartha attained enlightenment and became the Buddha — the Enlightened One. He then spent the rest of his life teaching the dhamma — the path of righteous living.

The First Sermon: He delivered his first sermon at Sarnath, near Varanasi. This event is known as setting in motion the Wheel of Dhamma (dhammachakka-ppavattana), and is represented in Buddhist sculpture by the wheel (dharmachakra).

Conclusion: The Buddha taught through reason and persuasion, not through displays of supernatural power. He convinced a grief-stricken woman of the inevitability of death, rather than miraculously bringing her dead child back to life. His appeal lay in the simplicity, compassion, and practicality of his message.

Q5. Explain the structure of a stupa with the help of its different components.**Ans.**

Introduction: The stupa is one of the most distinctive monuments of Buddhist architecture. The word 'stupa' is Sanskrit for a heap — it originated as a simple mound of earth built over the relics of the Buddha.

Components of a Stupa:

1. **Anda:** The main dome — a semi-circular mound of earth, symbolising the universe. It houses the relic chamber at the centre.
2. **Harmika:** A balcony-like square structure placed on top of the anda. It represented the abode of the gods. From the harmika rose a mast called the yashti.
3. **Yashti and Chhatra:** The yashti is a mast rising from the harmika; it is often surmounted by a chhatra (an umbrella), symbolising royalty and honour.
4. **Vedika:** A stone railing surrounding the mound. Early vedika were plain and resembled ancient bamboo or wooden fences. Later they became richly carved.
5. **Toranas (Gateways):** Richly carved gateways at the four cardinal points (north, south, east, and west). Worshippers entered through the eastern gateway.

Circumambulation: Worshippers entered through the eastern gateway and walked around the mound in a clockwise direction — imitating the sun's course through the sky. This ritual walking is called pradakshina.

Later Developments: Later stupas became more elaborate. The mound came to be decorated with niches and sculptures. At Amaravati and Shahji-ki-Dheri in Peshawar (Pakistan), the mounds were elaborately carved.

The Great Stupa at Sanchi: The most famous stupa is the Great Stupa at Sanchi. It has four beautifully carved toranas and a large anda. Its railings and gateways are covered with sculptures depicting Jataka tales, donors, and popular motifs.

Conclusion: The stupa is not merely an architectural monument — it is a symbol of the Buddhist cosmos and a site of pilgrimage and devotion.

Q6. Discuss the development of Mahayana Buddhism. How did it differ from the older tradition?**Ans.**

Introduction: By the 1st century CE, significant changes occurred in Buddhist ideas and practices that led to the emergence of a new form of Buddhism called Mahayana — literally, the 'Great Vehicle.'

The Older Tradition: In early Buddhism, the Buddha was regarded as a human being who had attained enlightenment through his own efforts, self-discipline, and moral living. Nibbana (liberation) was considered the goal of individual effort. The older tradition is called Theravada (the Way of the Elders) by its own followers.

The New Ideas of Mahayana: Mahayana Buddhism introduced several significant changes:

1. **The Buddha as Saviour:** The new thinking regarded the Buddha as a saviour figure — not just a human teacher, but a being who could ensure the salvation of devotees.
2. **The Bodhisatta:** Mahayana developed the concept of the Bodhisatta — a deeply compassionate being who accumulates enormous merit through virtuous actions but does NOT use this merit to attain nibbana for himself. Instead, the Bodhisatta stays in the world to help others attain liberation.
3. **Worship of Buddha's Image:** The worship of images of the Buddha and Bodhisattas became an important part of the Mahayana tradition.

Hinayana or Theravada? Supporters of Mahayana described the older tradition as 'Hinayana' — the Lesser Vehicle. However, followers of the older tradition NEVER called themselves Hinayana. They described themselves as Theravadins — those who followed the path of old, respected teachers (theras).

Spread: Mahayana spread widely across Central Asia, China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam.

Conclusion: The development of Mahayana Buddhism made it accessible to a far wider audience. The idea of a compassionate saviour figure and the Bodhisatta ideal gave ordinary people a sense that divine help was available to them.

Q7. Describe the growth of Puranic Hinduism and the development of Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

Ans.

Introduction: The notion of a personal saviour god was not unique to Buddhism. Similar ideas developed in different ways within the traditions that we now call Hinduism — particularly Vaishnavism and Shaivism.

Vaishnavism: Vaishnavism is a tradition in which Vishnu is worshipped as the principal deity. Cults developed around the various avatars or incarnations of Vishnu. Ten avatars were recognised — forms that the deity was believed to have assumed in order to save the world whenever it was threatened by disorder and evil. Different avatars were probably popular in different regions. Recognising each local deity as a form of Vishnu was one way of creating a more unified religious tradition. Vasudeva-Krishna, for example, was first worshipped in the Mathura region; over centuries, his worship spread across the country.

Shaivism: Shaivism is a tradition in which Shiva is regarded as the chief god. Shiva was symbolised primarily by the linga, although he was also depicted in human form. Images like

the Varaha (boar avatar of Vishnu) at Aihole, Karnataka, and the image of Durga at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu (both c. 6th century CE) are superb examples of this period's sculptural tradition.

The Role of the Puranas: The Puranas — compiled by Brahmanas in the middle of the first millennium CE — became important vehicles for spreading these traditions. Written in simple Sanskrit verse, they were meant to be read aloud to everyone, including women and Shudras who had no access to Vedic learning. Much of the Puranas evolved through interaction amongst priests, merchants, and ordinary men and women who travelled from place to place, sharing stories and beliefs.

Bhakti: Central to both Vaishnavism and Shaivism was the concept of bhakti — love and devotion between devotee and god. This personal, emotional bond was considered more important than ritual sacrifice.

Conclusion: Vaishnavism and Shaivism, along with the Puranic tradition, laid the foundations of what we today call popular Hinduism. Their spread through simple literature accessible to all sections of society was a remarkable development in the history of Indian religion.

Q8. Explain the role played by the begums of Bhopal in preserving the stupa at Sanchi.

Ans.

Introduction: The story of Sanchi's survival is inseparable from the generosity and wisdom of the rulers of the princely state of Bhopal — particularly Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum.

The Threat to Sanchi: When Sanchi was 'discovered' by Europeans in 1818, three of its four gateways were still standing. 19th-century European scholars were greatly excited by the find. In fact, both the French and the English sought permission from Shahjehan Begum to take away the eastern gateway — the best preserved — to display in museums in France and London. For a while, it seemed that Sanchi might suffer the same fate as Amaravati.

The Begums' Decision: Fortunately, both the French and the English were satisfied with carefully prepared plaster-cast copies of the gateway. The original remained at the site as part of the Bhopal state, thanks to Shahjehan Begum's wise decision.

Active Patronage: Shahjehan Begum and her successor Sultan Jehan Begum did not merely prevent the removal of gateways. They actively provided money for the preservation of the entire ancient site. Sultan Jehan Begum funded: - The museum that was built at Sanchi. - The guesthouse where the great archaeologist John Marshall lived and wrote his important volumes. - The publication of Marshall's landmark work on Sanchi.

John Marshall dedicated his important volumes on Sanchi to Sultan Jehan Begum, acknowledging her crucial support.

Contrast with Amaravati: The fate of Amaravati — where successive colonial officials removed sculptures piece by piece until the stupa was reduced to an insignificant mound — shows what might have happened to Sanchi without the begums' patronage.

Conclusion: The survival of Sanchi as a World Heritage Site (designated in 1989) owes an enormous debt to the wisdom and generosity of the begums of Bhopal, whose decision to preserve rather than permit plunder ensured that this jewel of Buddhist architecture endures for future generations.

Q9. How did early Buddhist sculptors represent the Buddha? Discuss the use of symbols in Buddhist art.

Ans.

Introduction: One of the most fascinating features of early Buddhist sculpture — particularly at Sanchi — is that the Buddha is NOT depicted in human form. Instead, sculptors used a system of symbols to convey the most important events in the Buddha's life.

Why Symbols? Historians suggest that early sculptors may have felt that the greatness of the Buddha could not be adequately conveyed in human form. By depicting his presence through symbols, they invited the viewer to contemplate the significance of the events being represented.

The Main Symbols:

1. Empty Seat: Represents the Buddha's meditation — the moment of deep contemplation that led to enlightenment. The empty seat reminds viewers that the Buddha was present, but beyond ordinary perception.
2. Bodhi Tree: Represents enlightenment. The tree does not stand simply for a tree — it symbolises the event in the Buddha's life when he attained enlightenment. Historians had to become familiar with Buddhist texts to understand this.
3. Wheel (Dharmachakra): Represents the Buddha's first sermon at Sarnath — the 'setting in motion of the Wheel of Dhamma.'
4. Stupa: Represents the mahaparinibbana — the Buddha's death and final liberation.
5. Footprints: Represent the presence of the Buddha — his path through the world.

The Challenge for Historians: Art historians had to acquire familiarity with Buddhist literary traditions in order to understand these symbols. For example, a sculpture that appeared at first glance to show a tree actually symbolised enlightenment — but only to those familiar with the hagiographies of the Buddha.

The Introduction of Human Form: Later, with the development of Mahayana Buddhism and the influence of Greek artistic traditions in the northwest (Taxila, Peshawar), the Buddha began to be depicted in human form. The Bodhisatta from Gandhara is a famous example — wearing

robes and with a hairstyle influenced by Greek sculpture.

Conclusion: The system of symbols used in early Buddhist art is a powerful example of how religious and artistic traditions interact. Understanding these symbols requires knowledge of both art history and Buddhist literature — demonstrating that text and image must always be read together.

Q10. Discuss the development of temple architecture in early India, from the earliest garbhagriha to the Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora.

Ans.

Introduction: Hindu temple architecture developed gradually over several centuries, from simple shrines to some of the most magnificent stone structures in the world.

The First Temples: Around the time stupas at Sanchi were acquiring their present form (c. 2nd century BCE onwards), the first Hindu temples were also being built. Early temples were simple structures. The essential feature was the garbhagriha — a small square room with a single doorway through which the worshipper could enter and offer worship to the deity's image. The garbhagriha literally means 'womb chamber.'

The Shikhara: Gradually, a tall structure known as the shikhara was built over the central shrine. The shikhara became a defining feature of North Indian temple architecture. A fine early example is the temple at Deogarh, Uttar Pradesh (c. 5th century CE), which has an early shikhara over the garbhagriha. The temple walls were decorated with sculpture — like the magnificent Vishnu reclining on the serpent Sheshnag, also from Deogarh.

Later Elaborations: Later temples became far more elaborate, incorporating: - Mandapas (assembly halls) for large gatherings. - Huge walls and gateways (gopurams in South India). - Arrangements for supplying water to the temple complex.

Artificial Caves: One unique feature of early Indian religious architecture was the tradition of hollowing out huge rocks to create artificial caves. The earliest were the Barabar caves in Bihar (3rd century BCE), built on the orders of Asoka for the Ajivika sect. This tradition continued and reached magnificent heights with the Buddhist cave complexes at Ajanta and the Brahmanical caves at Mahabalipuram.

The Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora: The tradition culminated in the 8th century CE with the carving of the Kailashnatha Temple at Ellora (Maharashtra) — a dedication to Shiva (Kailashnatha = a name of Shiva). The entire temple was carved out of a single piece of rock. A copperplate inscription records the amazement of the chief sculptor when he completed the temple: 'Oh how did I make it!'

Conclusion: The development of Hindu temple architecture over nearly a thousand years — from the simple garbhagriha to the Kailashnatha Temple — represents one of the great achievements of human creativity. Each stage reflected deeper theological ideas about the nature of the divine and the relationship between the worshipper and the deity.

Q11. What were the Jataka tales? How were they depicted in the sculpture at Sanchi?

Ans.

Introduction: The Jataka tales are stories of the Buddha's previous lives — the hundreds of lives he lived before his final birth as Siddhartha Gautama, in which he gradually accumulated the merit and wisdom that led to his enlightenment.

The Jataka Tales: These stories were originally oral narratives, later compiled into a written text called the Jatakamala. They were enormously popular because they were told in the language of ordinary people and dealt with themes of generosity, compassion, justice, and wisdom. The heroes of the Jataka tales — whether kings, animals, or ordinary folk — always demonstrate virtues that Buddhism valued.

At Sanchi: The sculptures at Sanchi depict many Jataka stories. A famous example is Figure 4.13 — a scene that appears at first glance to show a rural landscape with thatched huts, trees, and village activities. However, art historians studying the image carefully — and comparing it with Buddhist textual traditions — identified it as the Vessantara Jataka.

The Vessantara Jataka: This is the story of a generous prince named Vessantara who gave away everything he possessed — including his kingdom — to a Brahmana, and then went to live in the forest with his wife and children. The story celebrates extreme generosity as a supreme virtue.

The Challenge for Historians: Without knowledge of Buddhist literature, the sculpture would appear to be a pleasant rural scene, its narrative meaning entirely lost. This example shows why art historians must always read text alongside image.

Animals in Jataka Art: Many Jataka tales involve animals — the Buddha is reborn as an elephant, a deer, a monkey, and various other creatures. At Sanchi, some of the finest depictions of animals are found: elephants, horses, monkeys, and cattle. While Jataka tales contain animal stories, it is likely that many of these animal carvings were made primarily to create lively and attractive scenes for viewers.

Conclusion: The Jataka tales were thus both a literary tradition and a visual tradition. At Sanchi, they transformed the stupa into a three-dimensional picture book of the Buddha's journey towards enlightenment — accessible to all visitors, whether literate or not.

Q12. Discuss the teachings of the Buddha as found in the Sutta Pitaka. What made Buddhism attractive to people of different backgrounds?

Ans.

Introduction: The teachings of the Buddha have been reconstructed primarily from stories found in the Sutta Pitaka — one of the three baskets (Tipitaka) of Buddhist literature. While some stories describe the Buddha's miraculous powers, others suggest he taught through

reason and gentle persuasion.

Key Teachings:

1. Anicca (Transience): The world is transient and constantly changing. Nothing in the world is permanent.
2. Anatta (Soullessness): There is nothing permanent or eternal in the world — not even a soul. This was a radical departure from the Brahmanical and Upanishadic idea of the atman (individual soul).
3. Dukkha (Sorrow): Sorrow is intrinsic to human existence. It is by following the path of moderation between severe penance and self-indulgence that human beings can rise above worldly troubles.
4. Individual Agency: The Buddha emphasised that human beings can transform themselves and their social world through their own efforts.
5. Social Ethics: As the Sutta Pitaka records, the Buddha gave practical advice on social relationships — advising a wealthy householder named Sigala to treat his servants with kindness, supply them with food and wages, tend them in sickness, and share delicacies with them.

Why Buddhism Was Attractive:

Buddhism grew rapidly because it appealed to many different groups: - People dissatisfied with the Brahmanical emphasis on ritual and birth-based hierarchy. - People confused by the rapid social and economic changes of the period. - Workers, craftspeople, and slaves — because the sangha accepted them as equals. - Women — because they could join the sangha and achieve spiritual liberation. - The wealthy — because the values of metta (fellow feeling) and karuna (compassion) gave them an ethical framework for their dealings.

Conclusion: The genius of the Buddha's teaching was its combination of philosophical depth and practical simplicity. It offered a path to liberation that was accessible to all — regardless of birth, gender, or social status.

Q13. Describe what a kutogarashala was and explain the intellectual debates that took place in the mid-first millennium BCE in India.

Ans.

Introduction: The mid-first millennium BCE was a period of extraordinary intellectual activity in India. Teachers of many traditions — Brahmanical, Buddhist, Jain, materialist, and fatalist — debated each other vigorously.

The Kutogarashala: Buddhist texts describe a type of hut with a pointed roof (kutogarashala) where travelling mendicants halted. These huts were often found in groves near towns and cities, and they served as informal debating arenas. Teachers from different traditions would

stop there, discuss their ideas, and try to persuade each other and any laypersons present of the validity of their philosophical positions. Buddhist texts mention as many as 64 sects or schools of thought.

Key Philosophical Debates:

1. **The Sacrificial Tradition vs. New Thinkers:** The older Brahmanical tradition held that proper performance of sacrifices (yajnas) by Brahmin priests was essential for well-being and prosperity. Upanishadic thinkers questioned whether rituals were sufficient and turned to philosophical reflection on the self (atman) and ultimate reality (Brahman).
2. **Fatalists vs. Others:** The Ajivikas (led by Makkhali Gosala) argued that everything is predetermined — neither karma nor effort can change a person's destiny. This was deeply controversial. How can you advocate ethical living if everything is fixed?
3. **Materialists vs. Others:** The Lokayatas (like Ajita Kesakambali) denied the existence of the soul, karma, rebirth, and any merit in virtuous actions. For them, human beings were simply combinations of four elements that dissolved at death.
4. **Buddhism and Jainism:** Both Mahavira and the Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas and the idea that birth determines a person's spiritual potential. They insisted that liberation was available to anyone through their own moral effort.

The Stakes: The stakes in these debates were high. If a philosopher convinced his rivals, their followers might switch allegiance. Support for a particular sect could grow or shrink depending on the quality of arguments made.

Conclusion: This period of debate produced some of the most enduring philosophical systems in world history. The dialogue between different traditions enriched each of them and contributed to the remarkable diversity of Indian philosophical thought.

Q14. Who were the Bodhisattas and what role did they play in Mahayana Buddhism?

Ans.

Introduction: The concept of the Bodhisatta is one of the most important and moving ideas in all of Buddhist thought. It emerged in Mahayana Buddhism around the 1st century CE and transformed the nature and appeal of the religion.

What is a Bodhisatta? The word 'Bodhisatta' (Sanskrit: Bodhisattva) means 'one whose essence is awakening.' A Bodhisatta is a deeply compassionate being who has accumulated enormous merit through virtuous actions over many lifetimes. However, unlike an ordinary monk who attains nibbana and is liberated from the cycle of rebirth, the Bodhisatta consciously chooses NOT to attain final nibbana for himself. Instead, the Bodhisatta remains in the world — or returns to it — in order to help all other sentient beings attain liberation.

Why This Was a Revolutionary Idea: In the older tradition (Theravada), liberation was seen primarily as an individual goal — something each person had to achieve through their own

effort. The Bodhisatta idea introduced a profoundly social and altruistic dimension: the idea that the greatest spiritual achievement is not one's own liberation, but one's dedication to the liberation of all beings.

The Buddha as a Bodhisatta: In Mahayana texts, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives (the Jataka tales) were reinterpreted as the story of his long career as a Bodhisatta — accumulating merit through countless acts of generosity, compassion, and wisdom before his final birth as Siddhartha Gautama.

Bodhisattas in Art: Bodhisattas were depicted in sculpture and painting. The most famous sculptural tradition was that of Gandhara (northwest India and Pakistan), where Bodhisattas were shown in rich garments and jewellery — still in the world, not yet withdrawn from it — with a distinctly Greek artistic influence.

Popular Appeal: The idea of the Bodhisatta made Mahayana Buddhism enormously popular. Ordinary believers could pray to Bodhisattas for help. The compassion of the Bodhisatta was available to everyone — rich and poor, learned and illiterate.

Conclusion: The Bodhisatta ideal remains one of the most powerful and enduring ideas in the Buddhist tradition. It transformed Buddhism from a path for dedicated monks into a universal religion of compassion.

Q15. Discuss the inscription of Dhanavati and what it tells us about women's participation in Buddhist life.

Ans.

Introduction: One of the most valuable sources for understanding the social history of Buddhism is the inscription of Dhanavati, a bhikkhuni (female monk) from the Kushana period.

The Inscription: The inscription reads: 'In the year 33 of the maharaja Huvishka (a Kushana ruler), in the first month of the hot season on the eighth day, a Bodhisatta was set up at Madhuvana by the Mikkhuni Dhanavati, the sister's daughter of the Mikkhuni Buddhamita, who knows the Tipitaka, the female pupil of the bhikkhu Bala, who knows the Tipitaka, together with her father and mother.'

What This Inscription Tells Us:

- 1. Women as Patrons:** Dhanavati installed a Bodhisatta image — she was an active patron of Buddhist art. This shows that women were not merely passive followers but active participants in religious life, commissioning religious images as acts of merit and devotion.
- 2. Women's Education:** Dhanavati is described as knowing the Tipitaka — the entire canon of Buddhist literature. So too is her maternal aunt, Mikkhuni Buddhamita. This is remarkable: two women in the same family had mastered the most advanced Buddhist learning. Women in Buddhism had access to a level of education that was unusual in the ancient world.

3. Cross-Gender Learning: Dhanavati learned the Tipitaka from a male monk — bhikkhu Bala. This shows that in Buddhism, learning was transmitted across gender lines. A woman could be the pupil of a male teacher, and could achieve equal mastery.

4. Family Networks: The inscription mentions Dhanavati's family — her aunt, her teacher, her father and mother. This suggests that Buddhist participation was often a family tradition, with knowledge and piety transmitted within families.

5. Dating by Regnal Year: Dhanavati dates the inscription by the regnal year of the Kushana ruler Huvishka — standard practice in ancient India, showing a connection between the Buddhist community and royal chronology.

Conclusion: Dhanavati's inscription is a small document with large implications. It tells us that women in Buddhism could be educated, independent, economically active (able to commission religious images), and spiritually accomplished. It is one of many pieces of evidence that suggest Buddhism was — at least in principle and often in practice — far more egalitarian than many other religious traditions of the ancient world.

Q16. Explain the significance of the Therigatha as a historical source. What does it tell us about women in early Buddhism?

Ans.

Introduction: The Therigatha ('Verses of the Elder Nuns') is a unique and precious text — part of the Sutta Pitaka — consisting of verses composed by bhikkhunis (female monks). It is one of the earliest collections of women's writing in world literature, and a vital historical source for understanding women's social and spiritual experiences in early Buddhism.

The Story of Punna: One of the most striking compositions in the Therigatha is by Punna, a dasi (slave woman) who went to the river each morning to fetch water for her master's household. There she regularly saw a Brahmana performing bathing rituals. One morning she challenged him:

'I am a water carrier, even in the cold... What makes you afraid of Brahmanas, and go down to the water? If you are freed from evil by washing in the water, then all the frogs, turtles, water-snakes, and crocodiles would go to heaven!'

The Brahmana replied that doing good prevents evil. Punna then challenged him further: 'If good actions prevent evil, why do you wash in the cold river?'

The Significance of This Story:

1. Social Radicalism: A dasi — the lowest social category — has the confidence and the philosophical knowledge to challenge a Brahmin's religious practice. This is extraordinary. It shows that Buddhism gave even the most marginalised women a voice and an education.

2. Women's Spiritual Equality: The Therigatha as a whole shows that women achieved the same level of spiritual attainment as men within Buddhism. Many theris (elder nuns) became

teachers of dhamma.

3. Critique of Brahmanical Ritual: Punna's challenge to the Brahmana's bathing ritual echoes the broader Buddhist critique of the efficacy of Vedic rituals. The argument is perfectly logical: if washing in water purifies from sin, then water creatures would naturally be the most spiritually advanced beings.

4. Women's Independence: The theris who composed these verses were not passive recipients of male authority. They were spiritually independent women who expressed their own understanding of dhamma through poetry.

Conclusion: The Therigatha is much more than a collection of verses. It is evidence that, at its best, early Buddhism offered women a spiritual path, an education, a community, and a voice. It remains one of the most remarkable documents of women's history from the ancient world.

Q17. What challenges do art historians face when interpreting ancient Indian sculpture? Illustrate with specific examples.

Ans.

Introduction: Interpreting ancient Indian sculpture is a complex and fascinating challenge. Art historians must combine knowledge of texts, traditions, and artistic conventions — and even then, they do not always reach a definitive answer.

Challenge 1: Grappling with the Unfamiliar — European Bias: When 19th-century European scholars first encountered Indian sculpture, many were horrified by 'grotesque' figures with multiple arms and heads, or combinations of human and animal forms. They judged Indian art by the standards of Greek sculpture — with which they were familiar. They were excited by Buddha and Bodhisatta images from the northwest (Taxila, Peshawar) because these looked more like Greek statues. This is a classic example of ethnocentrism — judging one culture's art by the standards of another.

Challenge 2: Symbols That Need Textual Knowledge: Early Buddhist sculptors did not depict the Buddha in human form. Instead, they used symbols. Without knowledge of Buddhist hagiographies, a viewer would see a tree, a wheel, or an empty throne — and not understand their meaning. Art historians had to study Buddhist texts carefully to decode these symbols.

Challenge 3: When Text and Image Do Not Match: Sometimes a sculpture seems to depict a story, but which story is unclear. The most famous example is the rock-cut panel at Mahabalipuram, Tamil Nadu. This vivid panel clearly depicts a dramatic scene, but art historians are sharply divided: - Some believe it depicts the descent of the Ganga from heaven — because the natural cleft through the rock could represent the river. - Others believe it depicts Arjuna doing penance on the river bank to acquire arms from Shiva — based on the Mahabharata. Both readings are supported by textual evidence. The sculpture itself does not resolve the debate.

Challenge 4: Popular Traditions Not Recorded in Texts: Not all sculptural motifs can be explained by the 'official' texts of a religious tradition. At Sanchi, James Fergusson (who had not read Buddhist literature) concluded that the site was a centre of tree and serpent worship — based purely on the images. He was wrong about the religious context, but not entirely wrong about the motifs — because pre-Buddhist popular traditions of tree and serpent veneration WERE integrated into Buddhist art.

The Lesson: Art history requires both visual analysis and textual scholarship. Neither alone is sufficient. A sculpture cannot be understood without its cultural context; and a text cannot tell us what a sculpture looks like. The two must be read together.

Conclusion: The challenges faced by art historians in interpreting ancient Indian sculpture remind us of an important truth: the full richness of any culture can never be captured by surviving monuments alone. The spectacular sites we study are, as the NCERT reminds us, 'just the tip of the iceberg.'

Q18. Why did Buddhism grow rapidly during and after the Buddha's lifetime? What values made it attractive?

Ans.

Introduction: Buddhism grew with remarkable speed — both during the Buddha's own lifetime and in the centuries after his death. Understanding why requires looking at both the historical context and the specific values that Buddhism offered.

The Historical Context: The mid-first millennium BCE was a time of rapid social and economic change in the Ganga valley. New kingdoms and cities were emerging. Trade was expanding. The older social order — in which Brahmin priests held supreme authority and birth determined a person's religious and social status — was being questioned. Many people were 'dissatisfied with existing religious practices and confused by the rapid social changes taking place around them.'

The Buddha's Approach — Reason, Not Miracle: The Buddha, according to the Sutta Pitaka, tried to convince people through reason and persuasion rather than through displays of supernatural power. A famous story: a grief-stricken woman came to the Buddha carrying her dead child, asking him to bring the child back to life. The Buddha gently convinced her of the inevitability of death — rather than performing a miracle. This rational, compassionate approach had enormous appeal.

Key Values:

1. **Metta and Karuna:** The emphasis on metta (fellow feeling) and karuna (compassion), especially for those who were younger and weaker, gave Buddhism a warm, human-centred quality.
2. **Individual Agency:** The Buddha taught that human beings — regardless of birth — could transform themselves and achieve liberation through their own effort. This was deeply

empowering in a society where birth determined everything.

3. **Social Equality:** The sangha accepted people from all social groups — wealthy men, craftspeople, women, even slaves — and treated them as equals within the community. This was radical for its time.

4. **Practical Ethics:** The Sutta Pitaka shows the Buddha giving practical ethical advice — on how masters should treat servants, how children should treat parents, how students should treat teachers. Buddhism was not just for monks — it offered ethical guidance for ordinary life.

5. **The Buddha's View of the Social World:** The Buddha regarded the social world as a creation of human beings, not divinely ordained. Therefore, it could be transformed. This was very different from the Brahmanical position, in which the social hierarchy (the varna system) was seen as divinely sanctioned.

Conclusion: Buddhism grew so rapidly because it offered something for almost everyone: a philosophical tradition for the intellectually inclined, a supportive community for the socially marginalised, practical ethics for the householder, and a path to liberation for anyone willing to make the effort. Its message was radical, but delivered with compassion — and that combination proved irresistible.

Q19. Describe the process by which Buddhist texts were prepared and preserved.

Ans.

Introduction: The Buddha taught orally — through discussion and debate, not through written texts. Understanding how his teachings were eventually compiled, written down, and preserved across centuries is an important part of understanding the history of Buddhism.

Oral Transmission: During the Buddha's lifetime, none of his speeches were written down. Men and women — perhaps children too — attended his discourses, listened, discussed, and memorised what they heard. This oral tradition was the primary method of transmitting the teachings for perhaps two centuries after the Buddha's death (c. 5th–4th century BCE).

The Council at Vesali: After the Buddha's death, his teachings were compiled by his disciples at a council of 'elders' or senior monks at Vesali (Vaishali, in present-day Bihar). These compilations became known as the Tipitaka — literally, 'three baskets' to hold different types of texts. They were first transmitted orally, then classified according to length and subject matter.

The Three Baskets: 1. Vinaya Pitaka: Rules and regulations for those who joined the sangha. 2. Sutta Pitaka: The Buddha's teachings. 3. Abhidhamma Pitaka: Philosophical matters.

Regional Texts: As Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, other texts were compiled: the Dipavamsa (the island chronicle) and the Mahavamsa — regional histories of Buddhism. Many of these texts included biographies of the Buddha. Some of the oldest texts are in Pali; later compositions are in Sanskrit.

Chinese Pilgrims: When Buddhism spread to East Asia, Chinese pilgrims like Fa Xuan and Xuan Zang travelled all the way from China to India to search for original texts. They took manuscripts back to China, where scholars translated them. Indian Buddhist teachers also travelled to China to disseminate the teachings.

Preservation in Monasteries: Buddhist texts were preserved in manuscripts for several centuries in monasteries across Asia. Modern translations have been prepared from Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan texts — showing the extraordinary geographical spread of Buddhist learning.

Conclusion: The preservation of Buddhist texts is a remarkable story of collective effort — of thousands of monks memorising teachings, of scribes carefully copying manuscripts, of pilgrims carrying texts across deserts and mountains. It is because of this extraordinary tradition of preservation that we can still read the words of the Buddha today, twenty-five centuries after he taught under a tree at Sarnath.

Q20. Compare and contrast Jainism and Buddhism in terms of their philosophical ideas and social impact.

Ans.

Introduction: Jainism and Buddhism both emerged in the mid-first millennium BCE as challenges to the Brahmanical religious order. They shared some important features but also differed significantly in their philosophical ideas and social impact.

Similarities:

1. **Challenge to Brahmanical Authority:** Both Mahavira and the Buddha rejected the authority of the Vedas and questioned the idea that birth determined a person's spiritual potential.
2. **Emphasis on Individual Effort:** Both traditions stressed that liberation must be achieved through one's own moral effort — not through priestly intercession or divine grace.
3. **Non-Violence:** Ahimsa is important in both traditions. However, Jainism takes it to a far more radical extent.
4. **Monastic Community:** Both established communities of monks and nuns, and both admitted women.
5. **Critique of Vedic Sacrifice:** Both rejected the Vedic sacrificial tradition as a means to liberation.

Differences:

1. **Nature of the World:** Jainism holds that the entire world is animated — even stones and rocks have life. Buddhism does not go this far; it focuses on the suffering of sentient beings.
2. **Ahimsa:** In Jainism, ahimsa is the supreme principle — monks sweep the ground before walking to avoid stepping on insects. In Buddhism, ahimsa is important but is balanced with

the middle path.

3. Karma: In Jainism, even involuntary actions accumulate karma; extreme asceticism is needed to burn off past karma. In Buddhism, intention (cetana) is what matters — only intentional actions create karma.

4. Monastic Existence: In Jainism, monastic existence is a NECESSARY condition of salvation. In Buddhism, the Buddha himself took a middle path — rejecting extreme asceticism — and lay followers could also attain liberation.

5. Spread: Buddhism spread far beyond India — to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, China, Japan, and Korea. Jainism remained primarily within India, though it produced rich literary traditions in Prakrit, Sanskrit, and Tamil.

Social Impact:

Both traditions challenged the caste hierarchy and offered equality within their monastic communities. Both admitted women, though the sangha in Buddhism was larger and more influential. Buddhism had a broader social reach because it was more accessible to lay followers and spread across a larger geographical area.

Conclusion: Jainism and Buddhism together represented the most significant philosophical challenge to Brahmanical orthodoxy in ancient India. While Jainism remained a more austere and India-centred tradition, Buddhism became one of the world's great religions. Both, however, left deep marks on Indian thought, culture, and art that endure to this day.

Quick Revision Checklist

Sanchi	Location, discovery (1818), begums of Bhopal, in situ preservation, 1989 World Heritage
Amaravati	Discovery 1796, Walter Elliot, Elliot Marbles, H.H. Cole's protest, destruction
Jainism	Mahavira, 23 tirthankaras, ahimsa, 5 vows, karma, monastic life necessary
Buddhism	Siddhartha Gautama, 3 sights, enlightenment, Sarnath, anicca/anatta/dukkha, sangha
Sangha	Bhikkhus, bhikkhunis, Mahapajapati Gotami, Therigatha, Vinaya Pitaka, Tipitaka
Stupas	Anda, harmika, yashti, chhatra, vedika, torana, clockwise circumambulation
Buddhist Art	No human form, symbols: empty seat/wheel/bodhi tree/stupa/footprints
Mahayana	Buddha as saviour, Bodhisatta concept, Theravada vs Hinayana distinction
Vaishnavism	Vishnu, 10 avatars, bhakti, Puranas, Vasudeva-Krishna
Shaivism	Shiva, linga, human form, Durga, Kailashnatha at Ellora
Temples	Garbhagriha, shikhara, Deogarh temple, Kailashnatha Ellora (single rock)

All the Best for Your Exams! — Keep Revising, Keep Shining!