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PRELIMS RESEARCH | GS PAPER 1 | ANCIENT HISTORY AND ART & CULTURE

UPSC Prelims Research: Ancient History and Art & Culture 2026

All 15 Ancient History and Art & Culture questions of UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination 2026, General Studies Paper 1, with the correct answer and an explanation of every option.

Q. Which one of the following Carnatic music ragas is similar to Raga Bilawal in Hindustani music?

(a) Nat Bhairavi
(b) Kamavardhini
(c) Hanumatodi
(d) Dheera Shankarabharanam

Answer: (d) Dheera Shankarabharanam

Bilawal and Shankarabharanam

- **Bilawal** is both a raga and one of the **ten thaats** (parent scales) of Hindustani music, as classified by **Pt. V. N. Bhatkhande**. It uses **all seven shuddha (natural) notes**: Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni, which matches the Western **major scale**. It is a **morning raga**.
- In Carnatic music, the parent scales are the **72 melakarta ragas** (systematised by **Venkatamakhi** in the 17th century). The 29th melakarta, **Dheera Shankarabharanam** (usually called **Shankarabharanam**), uses the same natural notes, so it is the Carnatic counterpart of Bilawal.

Carnatic melakarta	Notes	Hindustani thaat
Dheera Shankarabharanam (29)	All natural notes	Bilawal
Natabhairavi (20)	Komal Ga, Dha, Ni	Asavari
Hanumatodi (8)	Komal Re, Ga, Dha, Ni	Bhairavi
Kamavardhini / Pantuvarali (51)	Komal Re, Dha; tivra Ma	Purvi

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Mechakalyani (65)	Tivra Ma	Kalyan (Yaman)
Harikambhoji (28)	Komal Ni	Khamaj

- **(a) Nat Bhairavi** corresponds to **Asavari** thaat; it is the natural minor scale.
- **(b) Kamavardhini** (Pantuvarali) corresponds to **Purvi** thaat.
- **(c) Hanumatodi** corresponds to **Bhairavi** thaat (all four movable notes flat). Note that Hindustani **Todi** thaat is a different scale.

Q. Consider the following statements:

I. Pali texts contain the first definite references to coins, e.g., kahapana, nikkha, kamsa, and kakanika.

II. The literary evidence from Pali texts is corroborated by archaeological evidence of punch-marked coins from many sites, most of them made of silver.

The above statements have been associated with which of the following?

1. Emergence of urban life

2. Transition to money economy

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) Both 1 and 2
(d) Neither 1 nor 2

> **Answer: (c) Both 1 and 2**

Coins and the Second Urbanisation (c. 600–300 BCE)

- The **Pali canon** (Buddhist texts) gives the **first clear references to coins**: **kahapana** (karshapana), **nikkha** (nishka), **kamsa** and **kakanika** (a small copper coin). Vedic texts mention nishka and shatamana, but these were probably **ornaments or units of value**, not true coins.
- **Punch-marked coins (PMCs)** are India's earliest coins. They were made by stamping symbols (sun, tree, hill, animal) on pieces of metal, mostly **silver** and some copper. They are found at **Taxila, Kaushambi, Rajghat, Ujjain, Patna** and many other sites of the **Ganga valley**.
- **Link to inference 1 (urban life):** coins appear together with the **second urbanisation**, the rise of cities such as **Rajagriha, Shravasti, Kaushambi, Champa, Varanasi and Ujjain** in the age of the **Mahajanapadas**. Towns needed coins for trade, crafts and markets, and guilds (**shreni**) of merchants and artisans appear in the same texts.
- **Link to inference 2 (money economy):** exchange shifted from **barter and cattle** to **metal currency**. Pali texts also mention **loans on interest**, wages paid in coin and taxes, showing the growth of a money economy.
- So both statements are associated with urban life and with the shift to a money economy.

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Q. Which of the following temples has/have a Nagara-style shikhara?

1. Malegitti Shivalaya, Badami

2. Huchimalligudi Temple, Aihole

3. Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh

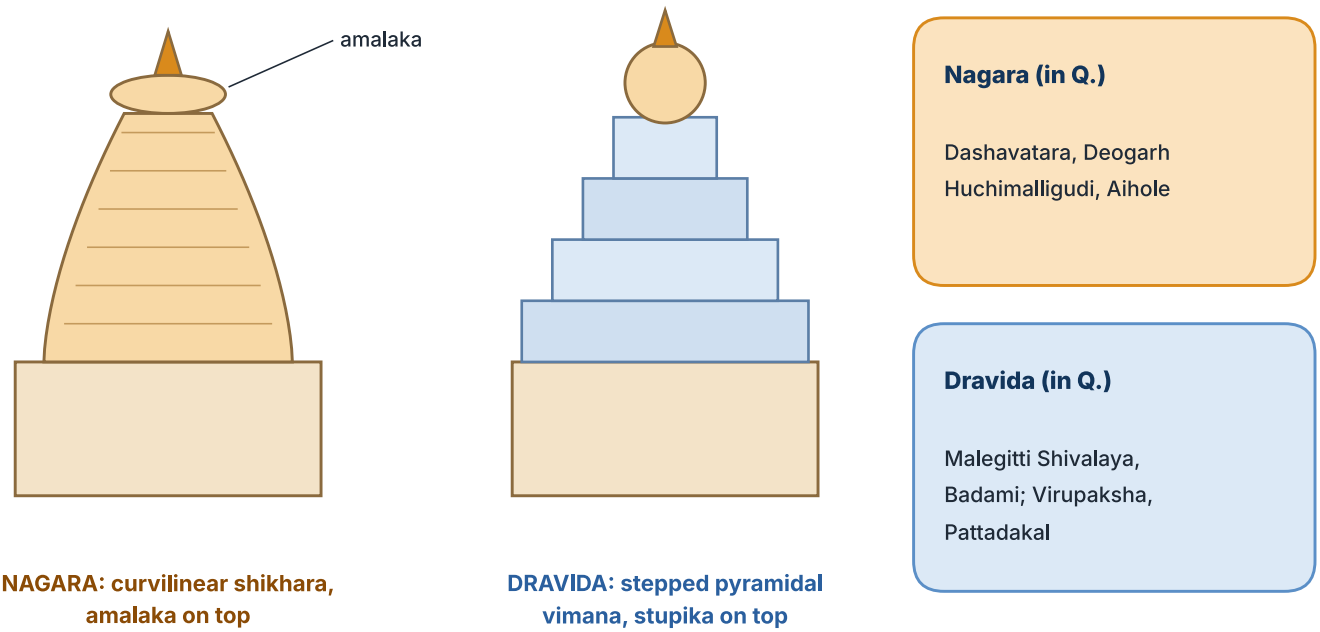
4. Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 2 and 3
(c) 3 only
(d) 3 and 4

Answer: (b) 2 and 3

Nagara and Dravida Temples



Nagara and Dravida temple towers compared

- **Nagara** (northern) temples have a **curvilinear tower (shikhara)** topped by an **amalaka** and kalasha. **Dravida** (southern) temples have a **pyramidal, stepped vimana** crowned by a **stupika (shikhara)**, usually inside a walled enclosure with gopurams.
- **1. Malegitti Shivalaya, Badami: Dravida.** A small early **Chalukya** temple (late 7th century) on a boulder hill; it has a **stepped Dravida vimana**. No Nagara shikhara.
- **2. Huchimalligudi, Aihole: Nagara.** An early Chalukya temple (7th century) at Aihole, the "cradle of Indian temple architecture". It carries an early **rekha-nagara (curvilinear) shikhara** over its sanctum and is noted for one of the earliest **antaralas** (vestibule).

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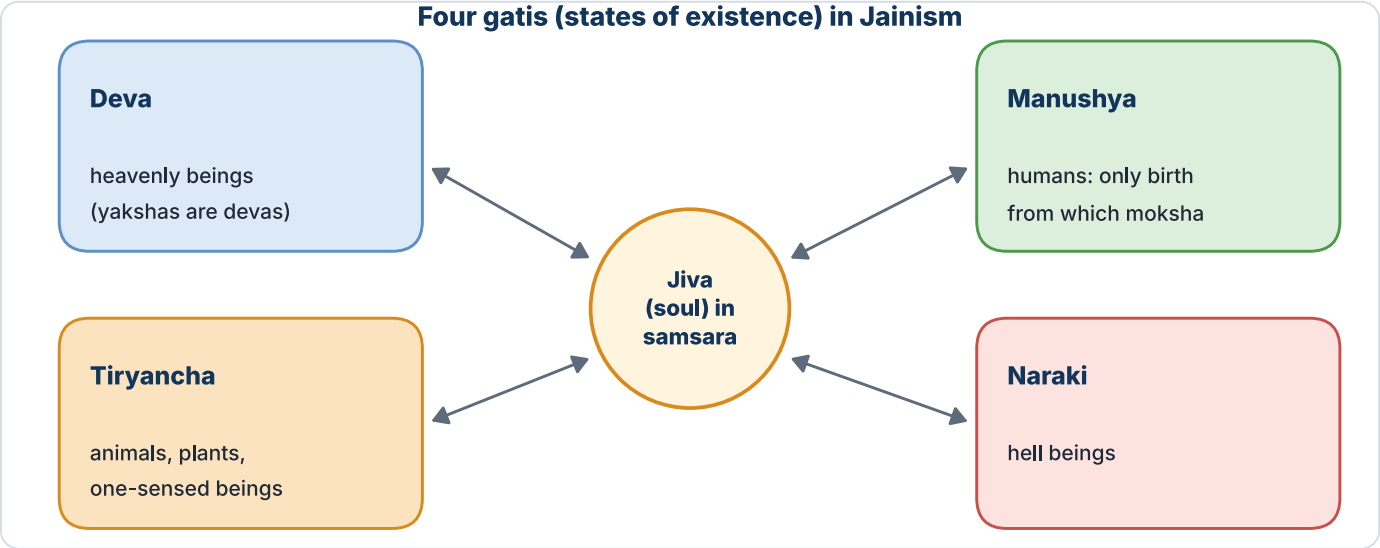
- **3. Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh: Nagara.** Built in the **Gupta period (c. 500 CE)** in **Lalitpur district, Uttar Pradesh**, it is one of the **earliest Nagara temples** with a (now partly ruined) **shikhara**. It is a **panchayatana** temple dedicated to Vishnu, famous for the **Sheshashayi Vishnu**, **Gajendramoksha** and **Nara-Narayana** panels.
- **4. Virupaksha Temple, Pattadakal: Dravida.** Built around **745 CE** by **Queen Lokamahadevi** to celebrate **Vikramaditya II's** victory over the Pallavas of Kanchi, and modelled on the **Kailasanatha temple of Kanchipuram**. It is a classic **Dravida** temple.
- **Pattadakal** (UNESCO World Heritage Site, 1987) is unique in having temples of **both styles side by side**: Nagara (**Papanatha, Galaganatha, Kashivishvanatha, Jambulinga, Kadasiddheshwara**) and Dravida (**Virupaksha, Mallikarjuna, Sangameshwara**).

Q. Among the four main forms of existence of life recognized in Jainism, which one of the following is not included?

(a) Deva (gods)
(b) Yaksha (demi-gods)
(c) Manushya (humans)
(d) Tiryancha (animals and plants)

Answer: (b) Yaksha (demi-gods)

The Four Gatis of Jainism



The four gatis of existence in Jainism

- Jainism holds that every **jiva (soul)** wanders through the cycle of birth and death (**samsara**) according to its **karma**. It can be born in one of **four gatis (states of existence)**:
  - **Deva**: heavenly beings (gods), who enjoy pleasure but must still be reborn.
  - **Manushya**: human beings. Only from human birth can a soul reach **moksha (kevala jnana)**.
  - **Tiryancha**: animals, birds, insects, **plants** and even one-sensed beings in earth, water, fire and air.
  - **Naraki**: beings of the **hells**, who suffer for their bad karma.

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- **Yakshas** are not a separate gati. In Jain belief they are a class of **devas**: the **shasana-devatas** (guardian deities) attending each Tirthankara, such as the **yakshi Ambika** with Neminatha and **Padmavati** with Parshvanatha.
- The Jain symbol of the **swastika** stands for these four gatis; its four arms show the four states of existence, and liberation lies beyond them.

Q. The Hallisalasya painting in the Bagh Caves represents:

(a) A joyous folk dance
(b) Buddha in a meditative pose
(c) The depiction of Shiva and Parvati on Kailasha
(d) Samudramanthan (Churning of the Ocean)

> **Answer: (a) A joyous folk dance**

Bagh Caves

- The **Bagh caves** are **nine Buddhist rock-cut caves** in **Dhar district, Madhya Pradesh**, on the **Baghani river**, a tributary of the Narmada. They date to the **late Gupta period (c. 5th–6th century CE)**, and their murals are close in style to **Ajanta**.
- The best paintings are in **Cave 4, the Rang Mahal ("palace of colours")**. The **Hallisaka (Hallisa-lasya)** scene shows a **lively group dance**: a **male dancer in the centre, encircled by women** dancing and playing **cymbals, drums and flutes**. Hallisaka was a **circular folk dance**, later linked with the **rasa** dance of Krishna and the gopis. So it is a **joyous folk dance**, not a religious scene.
- **(b)** Bagh's paintings are secular and courtly, unlike Ajanta's many **Jataka** and Buddha scenes. **(c)** Shiva and Parvati on Kailasha is a famous sculpture at **Ellora (Cave 16, Kailasa temple)**. **(d)** The **churning of the ocean** appears in later temple art, such as the long relief at **Angkor Wat**.
- Many Bagh paintings were damaged by seepage and were **copied in the 1920s**; some panels are kept at the **Gwalior museum**.

Q. Consider the following statements relating to the use of the place-value system in India:

1. The earliest epigraphic use of the place-value system in India is found in the Mankani plates from Gujarat (AD 595-596).

2. In the ninth century, place-values become general in inscriptions all over India.

3. The place-values have been found in Sanskrit inscriptions in South-east Asia as early as the seventh century.

Which of the statements given above are correct?

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1 and 3 only

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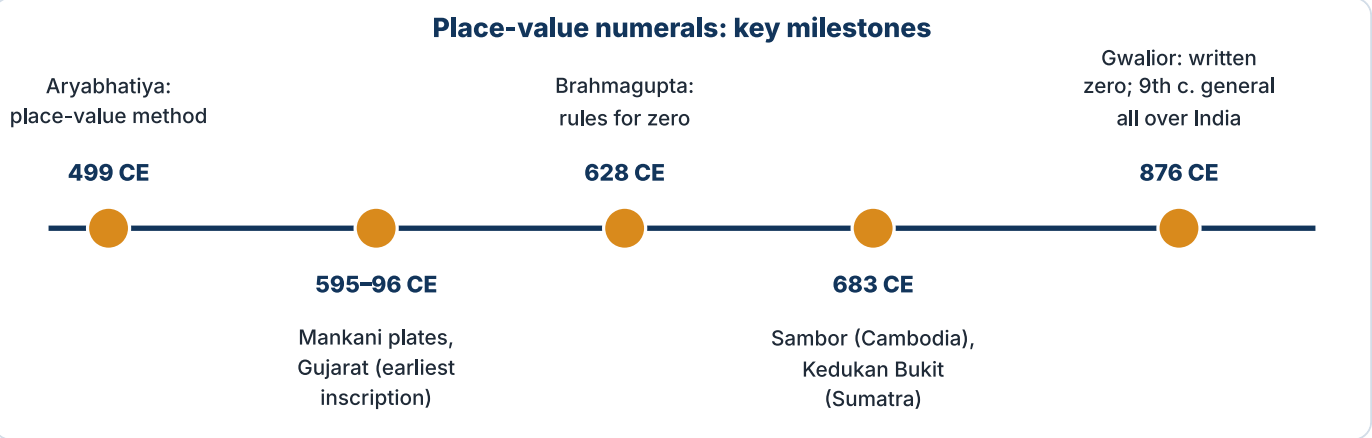
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3

The Decimal Place-Value System



Milestones of the place-value system

- In a **place-value system**, the value of a digit depends on its **position** (units, tens, hundreds), and a sign for **zero** marks an empty place. With just **ten symbols** any number can be written. This Indian invention travelled through the Arabs to Europe as the **"Hindu-Arabic numerals"**.
- **Statement 1 is correct.** The **Mankani (Sankheda) copper plates** from Gujarat, dated **346 of the Kalachuri era (AD 595–596)**, are regarded as the **earliest inscription** using place-value numerals in India (some scholars have questioned their authenticity).
- **Statement 2 is correct.** By the **9th century**, place-value numbers are common in inscriptions across India. The **Gwalior (Chaturbhuj temple) inscription of 876 CE** shows a **written zero** as a small circle.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** In **South-east Asia**, inscriptions of the **7th century** use place-value numbers with zero, for example the **Sambor inscription (Cambodia)** and **Kedukan Bukit inscription (Sumatra)**, both of **683 CE**, older than the Gwalior example.
- In texts, **Aryabhata** (Aryabhatiya, 499 CE) used a place-value method, and **Brahmagupta** (Brahmasphutasiddhanta, 628 CE) gave rules for calculating with **zero**. The **Bakhshali manuscript** also uses a dot for zero.

Q. Consider the following statements about the archaeological findings in Harappan towns:

I. There is wide occurrence of spindle-whorls in the houses but absence of spinning wheels.

II. Weights and measurement scales, complete with graduations have been discovered.

III. There are houses built in large part with baked bricks, around relatively spacious courtyards, with their own wells, bathing platforms, and large rooms.

Which of the following inferences can be drawn from the above statements?

1. Statement I suggests that spinning was a laborious activity done at home.

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2. Statement II suggests the extent of the scientific knowledge that the Harappans possessed.

3. Statement III suggests the emergence of a common property system.

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

> **Answer: (a) 1 and 2 only**

Reading the Harappan Evidence

- **Inference 1 is valid. Spindle-whorls** (small weights of clay or faience used with a hand spindle) are found in many houses, but the **spinning wheel (charkha)** was unknown; it reached India only in medieval times. Spinning thread by hand was **slow and laborious household work**, probably done largely by women. Cotton cloth itself is known from a fragment at **Mohenjo-daro**.
- **Inference 2 is valid.** The Harappans used **standardised cubical weights** of chert, following a **binary series (1, 2, 4, 8, 16, 32…) and then decimal multiples**, the base unit being about **13.6 g**. A **graduated scale** of shell from **Mohenjo-daro** and an ivory scale from **Lothal** show precise linear measurement. These reveal a good knowledge of **mathematics and measurement**.
- **Inference 3 is not valid.** Large, well-built **private houses** with their own wells, bathing areas and rooms point to **private property**, family wealth and **social differences** (rich and poor households), not to a **common property** system. At Mohenjo-daro many houses had **private wells**, while smaller houses and "barracks" suggest unequal living conditions.

Q. Consider the following statements about the Rigvedic period :

I. Irrigation from wells allowed agriculture to expand away from flood plains and strips on river margins into the present Punjab and Haryana plains having underground water levels reasonably close to the surface.

II. Draught-animal power was employed to draw up water out of the wells.

Which of the following information support/supports the above statements?

1. There is evidence in the Rigveda of the use of ashma chakra (stone pulley wheel) and ahava (strapped wooden pails) to draw up water.

2. Mention has been made in the Rigveda of the use of implements like parashu/kulisha (axe) and datra /sreni (sickle).

3. There is a history of the use of ox, even before the Rigveda, for ploughing the land and pulling the carts.

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2 only
(b) 1, 2 and 3

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(c) 1 and 3 only
(d) 3 only

> **Answer: (c) 1 and 3 only**

Wells and Farming in the Rigvedic Age

- **Information 1 supports both statements.** The Rigveda mentions wells (**avata, kupa**) from which water was raised using a **stone pulley wheel (ashma chakra)**, a **strap or rope (varatra)** and **wooden pails (ahava, kosha)**. Water lifted this way was led into channels (**kulya**) for the fields, so farming could spread beyond river banks into the plains of **Punjab and Haryana**, where groundwater is near the surface.
- **Information 3 supports statement II.** Oxen were used for **ploughing (with the plough, langala or sira)** and drawing carts long before the Rigveda: a **ploughed field** has been found at **Kalibangan** (Early Harappan) and **terracotta bullock-cart** models at Harappan sites. A society used to harnessing oxen could readily use them to **draw water from wells**.
- **Information 2 does not support the statements.** Axes (**parashu**) and sickles (**datra, srni**) show forest clearing and harvesting, but they say **nothing about wells or irrigation** or the use of animals to lift water.
- Rigvedic people were mainly **pastoral** (cattle as wealth: **gavishti**, the "search for cows", meant war), but agriculture was growing; the Rigveda knows only one grain, **yava (barley)**.

Q. Consider the following assertion: In the Pleistocene period either the Yamuna once flowed into the Indus, or the Sutlej flowed into the Yamuna and one major tributary of either had shifted from the Ganga to the Indus or vice versa.

Which of the following is/are the basis of the above assertion?

1. The Nadi-Sukta of the Rigveda

2. The explorations of the Sutlej and the Yamuna by Robert Bruce Foote

3. The presence of the same species of dolphins in both the Indus and the Ganga river systems

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 2
(d) 3

> **Answer: (d) 3**

Evidence for Ancient River Shifts

- **Basis 3 is correct.** Freshwater **river dolphins** (genus **Platanista**) live in both the **Indus** and the **Ganga–Brahmaputra** systems, which today are not connected. Such animals could have spread between the two only if, at some time in the **Pleistocene** (about 2.6 million to 11,700 years ago), the rivers were **linked**:

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the Yamuna flowing west into the Indus system, or the Sutlej flowing east into the Yamuna. This is the reasoning used by historians such as **Irfan Habib**.

- The two dolphins were earlier treated as one species; they are now recognised as **Indus river dolphin (Platanista minor)** and **Ganges river dolphin (Platanista gangetica)**, India's **National Aquatic Animal**. Their close kinship still shows a shared past.
- **Basis 1 is incorrect.** The **Nadi-sukta (Rigveda, Book 10, hymn 75)** lists rivers from east to west (Ganga, Yamuna, Sarasvati, Shutudri, Parushni...). It belongs to the **Holocene** (the last few thousand years) and says nothing about river courses in the Pleistocene.
- **Basis 2 is incorrect. Robert Bruce Foote**, the "father of Indian prehistory", found the first **palaeolithic hand-axe at Pallavaram near Madras (1863)** and worked mainly in **South India**, not on the Sutlej and Yamuna.

Q. What does an empty seat represent in early Buddhist iconography?

(a) The meditation of the Buddha
(b) The Buddha's First Sermon
(c) The Buddha's Mahaparinibbana
(d) The Buddha's Mahabhinishkramana

> **Answer: (a) The meditation of the Buddha**

Aniconic Symbols of the Buddha

- In early Buddhist art (c. 2nd century BCE–1st century CE), at **Sanchi, Bharhut and Amaravati**, the Buddha was **not shown in human form**. His presence and the events of his life were shown through **symbols**. The NCERT text *Themes in Indian History* notes that the **empty seat** was meant to indicate the **meditation of the Buddha**, and the **stupa** his **mahaparinibbana**.

Symbol	Event or idea
Empty seat (throne)	Meditation of the Buddha
Horse (riderless)	Great Departure (Mahabhinishkramana)
Bodhi tree	Enlightenment (Sambodhi)
Wheel (dharmachakra)	First Sermon at Sarnath
Stupa	Mahaparinibbana (death)
Footprints	The Buddha's presence
Lotus / elephant	Birth / Queen Maya's dream

- **(b) First Sermon** at **Sarnath** (Dhammachakkappavattana) is shown by the **wheel**, often with deer.
- **(c) Mahaparinibbana** at **Kushinagar** is shown by the **stupa**.
- **(d) Mahabhinishkramana**, the Great Departure from Kapilavastu, is shown by a **horse** (Kanthaka) without a rider, under a royal umbrella.
- The **human image** of the Buddha appeared later, around the **1st century CE**, in the **Gandhara** and **Mathura** schools.

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Q. Which of the following pairs of ancient and modern names of rivers is/are correctly matched?

1. Vitasta : Chenab

2. Asikni : Jhelum

3. Parushni : Ravi

4. Yavyavati : Beas

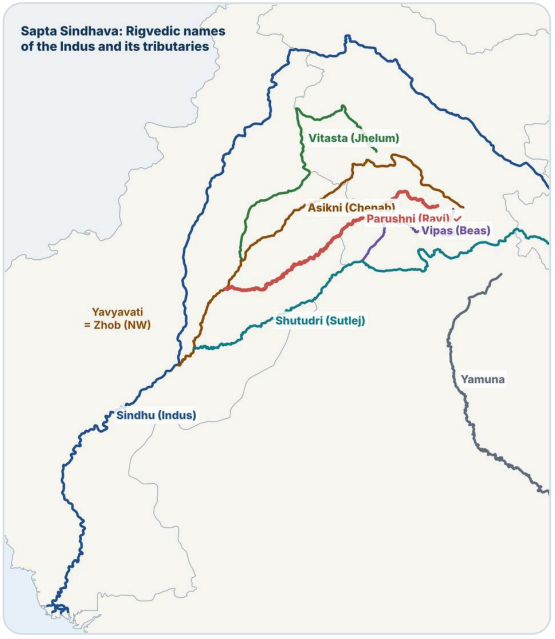
Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 3 and 4
(c) 3 only
(d) 4 only

Answer: (c) 3 only

Rigvedic Rivers

- **1. Incorrect. Vitasta** is the **Jhelum**.
- **2. Incorrect. Asikni** ("the dark one") is the **Chenab**.
- **3. Correct. Parushni** is the **Ravi**, on whose banks the **Battle of Ten Kings (Dasharajna)** was fought, in which **Sudas** of the Bharata tribe defeated a confederacy of ten tribes.
- **4. Incorrect.** The **Beas** was called **Vipas** (or Vipasha). **Yavyavati** is usually identified with the **Zhob** river in the north-west (present Pakistan).



Rigvedic and modern names of the rivers of the Indus system

Rigvedic name	Modern name
Sindhu	Indus
Vitasta	Jhelum
Asikni	Chenab
Parushni	Ravi
Vipas	Beas
Shutudri	Sutlej
Kubha / Krumu / Gomati	Kabul / Kurram / Gomal

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Sadanira	Gandak

- The land of the Indus and its tributaries was called **Sapta Sindhava** (land of seven rivers). The **Sarasvati** (often linked with the **Ghaggar–Hakra**) was the most praised river in the Rigveda (**naditama**).

Q. Which of the following statements on the Amaravati Stupa and its relief sculpture is/are correct?

1. It was located in the lower Krishna valley.

2. In India, it was next only to the Sanchi Stupa in size.

3. The Amaravati school of sculpture made a lasting impact on the later South Indian sculpture, and its products were carried to Sri Lanka and South-east Asia.

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 2 and 3 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

> **Answer: (b) 1 and 3 only**

Amaravati Stupa and School of Art

- **Statement 1 is correct.** The stupa (the **Mahachaitya**) stood at **Amaravati (ancient Dhanyakataka) in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh**, in the **lower Krishna valley**. It grew from about the **3rd–2nd century BCE** and flourished under the **Satavahanas** and later the **Ikshvakus**.
- **Statement 2 is incorrect.** Amaravati was **larger than Sanchi**. Its dome is estimated at about **50 m** in diameter, against about **36.6 m** for the Great Stupa at Sanchi, making it one of the largest stupas in India. It was dismantled over the centuries; many reliefs are now in the **Government Museum, Chennai** and the **British Museum, London**.
- **Statement 3 is correct.** The **Amaravati school** used white-green **limestone (Palnad marble)** for lively narrative panels full of movement, crowded scenes and graceful figures. It strongly influenced later **Pallava and Chola** sculpture, and its works and style spread to **Sri Lanka** (Anuradhapura) and **South-east Asia**.

School	Region	Material	Main patrons
Gandhara	North-west	Grey-blue schist, stucco	Kushanas
Mathura	Mathura (UP)	Spotted red sandstone	Kushanas
Amaravati	Lower Krishna valley	White limestone	Satavahanas, Ikshvakus

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Q. Which of the following pairs of the king and his dynasty in early historical Tamilakam is/are not correctly matched ?

1. Senguttuvan : Chera

2. Udiyanjeral : Chola

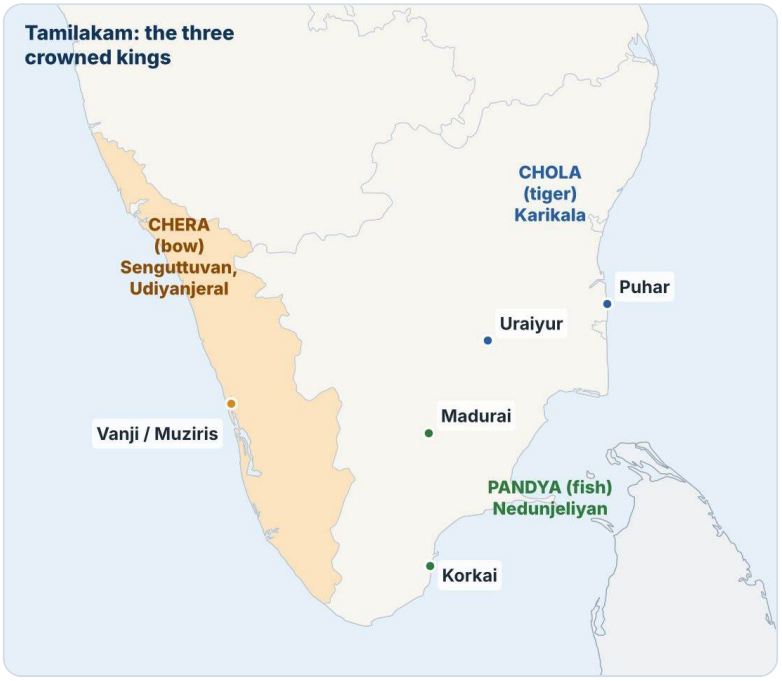
3. Nedunjeliyan : Pandya

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 and 2
(b) 2 only
(c) 1 and 3
(d) 3 only

Answer: (b) 2 only

The Three Crowned Kings (Muvendar)



The Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms of early Tamilakam

- **1. Correctly matched. Senguttuvan (the Red Chera)** was the most famous Chera king. The epic **Silappadikaram** says he led an expedition to the Himalayas to bring stone for an image of **Kannagi** and began the **Pattini (Kannagi) cult**. His brother **Ilango Adigal** is the traditional author of the epic.
- **2. Not correctly matched. Udiyanjeral** (Perunchorru Udiyan Cheralathan) was an early **Chera**, not a Chola. Tradition says he fed both armies at the **Kurukshetra war**, earning the title **"Perunchorru"** (great feast).
- **3. Correctly matched. Nedunjeliyan** was a great **Pandya** king who won the **Battle of Talaiyalanganam** against the Cheras, Cholas and five chieftains; he is praised in the **Maduraikanchi** of Mangudi Marudan.

Dynasty	Capital / port	Emblem	Famous ruler
Chera	Vanji / Muziris	Bow	Senguttuvan
Chola	Uraiyur / Puhar (Kaveripattinam)	Tiger	Karikala
Pandya	Madurai / Korkai	Fish (carp)	Nedunjeliyan

- The three dynasties are mentioned in **Ashoka's Rock Edicts II and XIII** as independent neighbours, and in the **Hathigumpha inscription** of Kharavela.

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Q. Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur, the famous classical singer from Karnataka, represented the:

(a) Agra Gharana
(b) Gwalior Gharana
(c) Patiala Gharana
(d) Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana

> **Answer: (d) Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana**

Pt. Mallikarjun Mansur (1910–1992)

- A **khayal** singer from **Dharwad, Karnataka**, he began in the **Gwalior** style and later trained with **Manji Khan** and **Bhurji Khan**, sons of **Ustad Alladiya Khan**, founder of the **Jaipur-Atrauli gharana**. He was known for rare and complex ragas (**aprachalit ragas**). Awards: **Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan** and **Padma Vibhushan (1992)**, and the **Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship**.
- **Jaipur-Atrauli gharana:** intricate, layered **taans**, rare ragas and blending of ragas (**jod ragas**). Other exponents: **Kesarbai Kerkar, Mogubai Kurdikar, Kishori Amonkar, Shruti Sadolikar, Ashwini Bhide-Deshpande**.

Gharana	Founder / key figure	Known exponents
Gwalior (oldest khayal gharana)	Haddu, Hassu Khan	Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Veena Sahasrabuddhe
Agra	Faiyaz Khan	Vilayat Hussain Khan
Kirana	Abdul Karim Khan	Bhimsen Joshi, Gangubai Hangal
Patiala	Fateh Ali, Ali Bakhsh	Bade Ghulam Ali Khan
Jaipur-Atrauli	Alladiya Khan	Mallikarjun Mansur, Kishori Amonkar

- **Dharwad** region gave India several great Hindustani vocalists: Mallikarjun Mansur, **Bhimsen Joshi, Gangubai Hangal, Kumar Gandharva** and **Basavaraj Rajguru**.

Q. In which one among the following texts does the term kshetra-patni ('mistress of the field') originate?

(a) Rigveda
(b) Atharvaveda
(c) Ashtadhyayi
(d) Arthashastra

> **Answer: (b) Atharvaveda**

Kshetra-patni and the Atharvaveda

- The term **kshetra-patni** ("mistress of the field") occurs in the **Atharvaveda**, in hymns connected with **agriculture, fertility and protection of crops**. The Atharvaveda is a collection of **charms, spells and**

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prayers for everyday life: healing, prosperity, good harvests and protection from evil. The **Rigveda** knows the male **Kshetrapati** ("lord of the field"), to whom a hymn is addressed.

- **(a) Rigveda:** the oldest Veda (c. 1500–1000 BCE), hymns to Agni, Indra, Soma and others; it has **Kshetrapati**, not kshetra-patni.
- **(c) Ashtadhyayi: Panini's** Sanskrit grammar (c. 5th–4th century BCE), with nearly **4,000 sutras**.
- **(d) Arthashastra: Kautilya's** treatise on statecraft; it calls the state's agricultural officer the **Sitadhyaksha** and crown land **sita**.

Veda	Content
Rigveda	Hymns of praise
Samaveda	Melodies (chants) drawn mostly from the Rigveda
Yajurveda	Sacrificial formulas
Atharvaveda	Charms, spells and prayers for daily life

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PRELIMS RESEARCH | GS PAPER 1 | MEDIEVAL INDIAN HISTORY

UPSC Prelims Research: Medieval Indian History 2026

All 1 Medieval Indian History questions of UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination 2026, General Studies Paper 1, with the correct answer and an explanation of every option.

Q. Which one of the following statements with regard to the Moidams, built by the Tai-Ahom kingdom and inscribed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, is/are correct?

1. They acted as army fortresses.

2. They were recreation centres of the Royals and Nobles.

3. They were burial grounds of the Royals and Nobles.

4. They were battle drill centres of the Royals and Nobles.

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1 only
(b) 1 and 3
(c) 3 only
(d) 2 and 4

Answer: (c) 3 only

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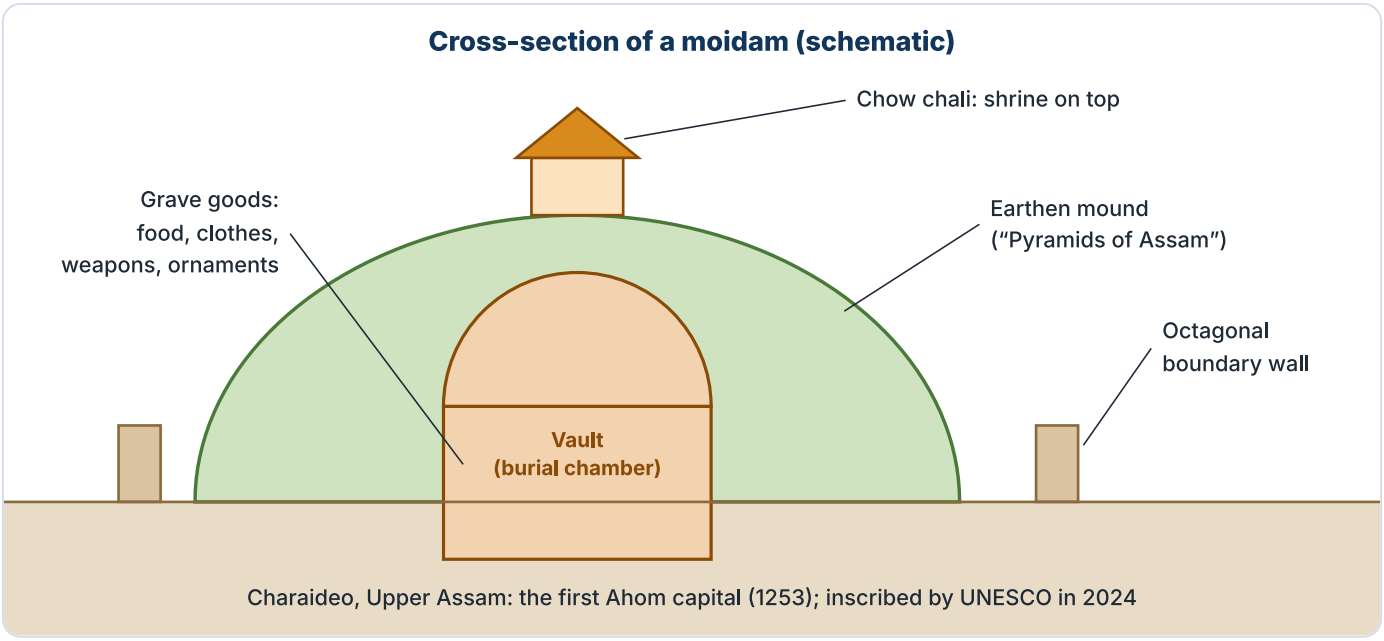
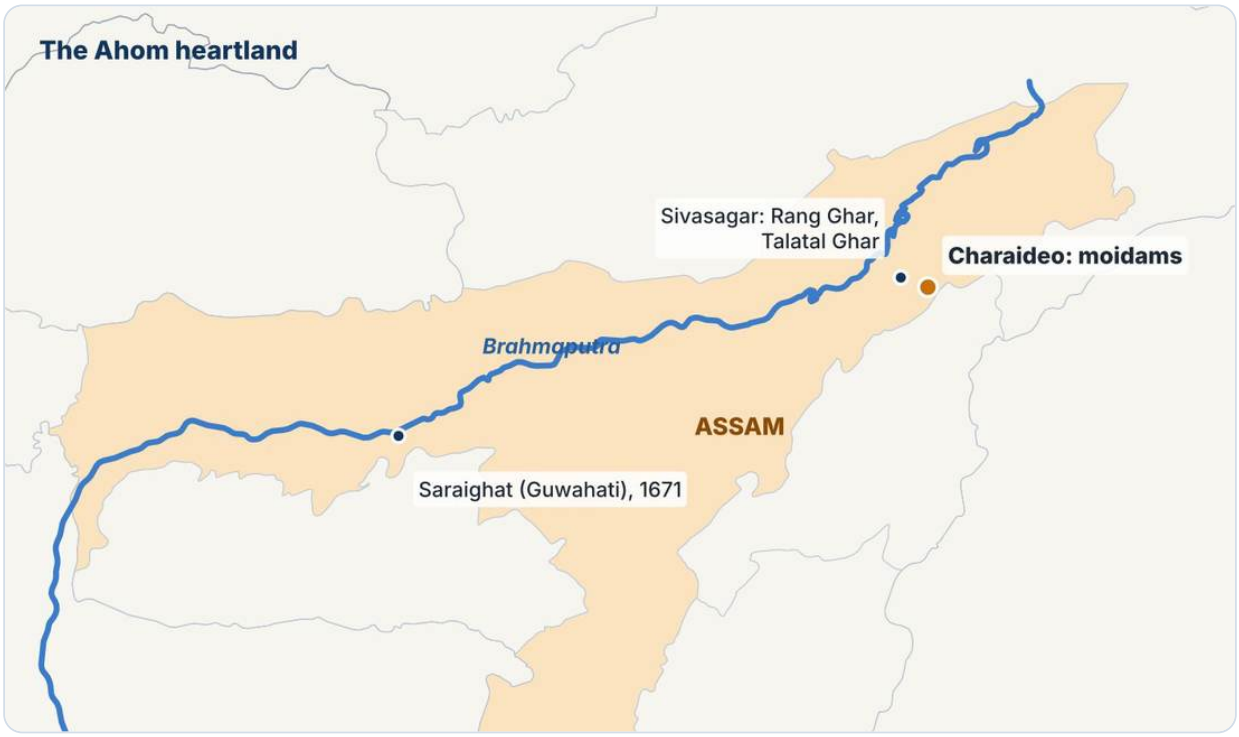
Moidams: the mound-burial system of the Ahoms



Parts of a moidam



Charaideo and other Ahom sites in Assam

- **Moidams** are **burial mounds** of the **Ahom kings, queens and nobles**. The main group is at **Charaideo**, in present-day **Charaideo district of Upper Assam**, near Sivasagar. Charaideo was the **first capital** of the Ahom kingdom, founded by **Chaolung Sukaphaa** in **1253**; he had entered the Brahmaputra valley from the upper Irrawaddy region in **1228**.
- **UNESCO inscription: "Moidams – the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty"** was inscribed as a **cultural** World Heritage Site in **July 2024**, at the **46th session** of the World Heritage Committee held in **New Delhi**. It became **India's 43rd** World Heritage Site and the **first cultural site in the North-East** (Kaziranga and Manas are natural sites).

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- **Structure:** each moidam has an **underground vault** (often with more than one chamber) built of brick or stone, covered by a **hemispherical earthen mound** that can be very large. On top stands a small pavilion called the **chow chali**, and the mound is ringed by an **octagonal boundary wall**. Because of their size they are often called the **"Pyramids of Assam"**.
- **Burial customs:** the dead king was buried with **grave goods**: food, clothes, weapons, ornaments, and in early times even **servants and animals**. In the **18th century**, under Hindu influence, the Ahoms began to **cremate** their dead and place the **ashes** in moidams. The rituals followed the Tai belief in honouring ancestors (**Me-Dam-Me-Phi**, the ancestor worship festival, is still observed).

Feature	Detail
Built by	Tai-Ahom dynasty (1228–1826)
Main site	Charaideo, Upper Assam (first Ahom capital)
Purpose	Burial of royals and nobles
Parts	Vault, earthen mound, chow chali (shrine) on top, octagonal wall
UNESCO	Cultural WHS, July 2024; India's 43rd

Why the other statements are wrong

- **Statement 1 (army fortresses):** moidams are **tombs**, not forts. The Ahoms built separate **earthen forts and ramparts (garhs)**, and their great river battle against the Mughals at **Saraighat (1671)** was led by **Lachit Borphukan**.
- **Statement 2 (recreation centres):** Ahom recreation was elsewhere: the **Rang Ghar** at Sivasagar was a **royal pavilion** from which kings watched **buffalo fights** and Bihu sports. Moidams were **sacred** places for ancestor worship.
- **Statement 4 (battle drill centres):** there is no evidence that moidams were used for military training. The **Talatal Ghar** and **Kareng Ghar** were the Ahom palace complexes; moidams were **closed burial mounds**.
- Only **statement 3** is correct, so the answer is **(c)**.

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UPSC Prelims Research: Modern Indian History 2026

All 5 Modern Indian History questions of UPSC Civil Services Preliminary Examination 2026, General Studies Paper 1, with the correct answer and an explanation of every option.

Q. The artificially fixed rupee-sterling exchange rate prescribed by the Hilton-Young Commission (1926) was adopted by the British Government for which one of the following reasons?

(a) Aiding the flow of remittances from India and maintaining India's creditworthiness
(b) Providing support to Indian importers
(c) Encouraging export of cotton produce from India
(d) Preventing depreciation of the Rupee in terms of gold

Answer: (a) Aiding the flow of remittances from India and maintaining India's creditworthiness

The Hilton-Young Commission and the 1s 6d ratio

- The **Royal Commission on Indian Currency and Finance (1925–26)**, chaired by **Edward Hilton Young**, reported in **1926**. It recommended a **gold bullion standard**, a **central bank** for India (which led to the **Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934**; the RBI started in **1935**) and an exchange rate of **1 shilling 6 pence (18d) per rupee**.
- The rate was put into law by the **Currency Act of 1927**. Before the First World War the rupee had stood at **1s 4d (16d)**. The government held the rupee at 18d by **contracting the money supply**, which is why the rate is described as **artificially fixed**.
- **Purshotamdas Thakurdas**, the only Indian member of the commission, wrote a **minute of dissent** and asked for the old **1s 4d** rate. Indian business groups (the later **FICCI**, set up in 1927) and nationalists called the 18d rate the **"ratio controversy"**: an overvalued rupee hurt Indian producers and exporters.

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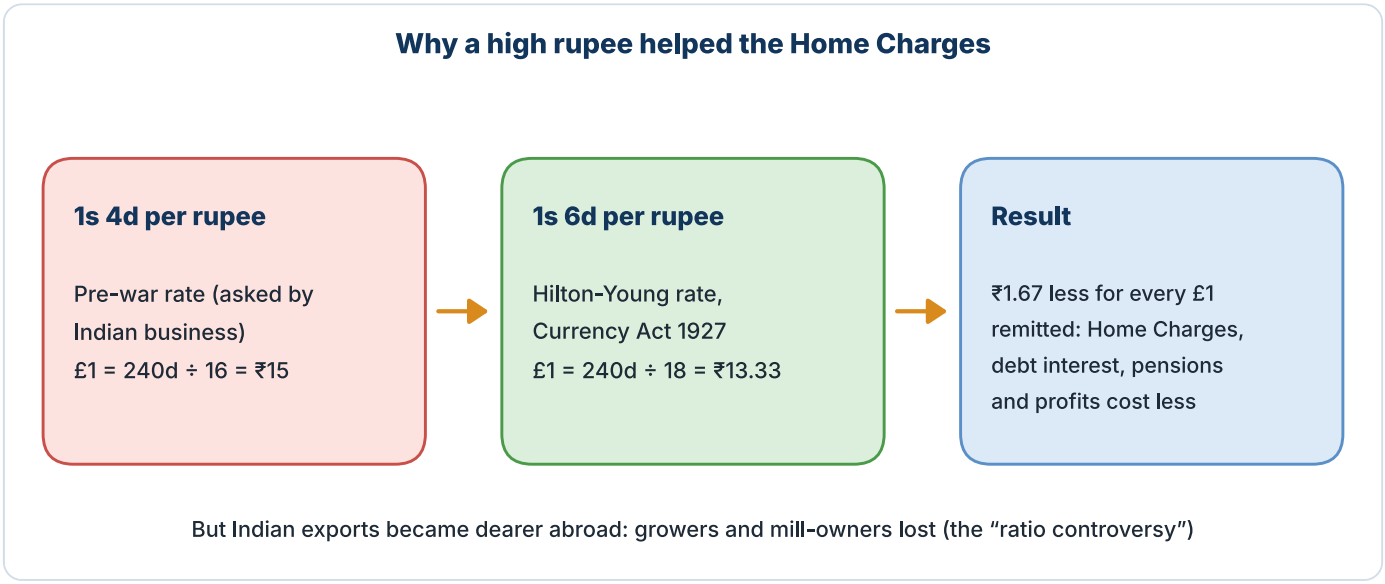

How the 1s 6d ratio cut the rupee cost of remittances

Why the British wanted a high rupee

- India had to pay large sums in sterling every year: the **Home Charges** (interest on the sterling debt, pensions and salaries of British officials, India Office costs, army stores), plus **profits and dividends** of British firms. A higher rupee meant **fewer rupees for each pound** sent to Britain, so the government could make these **remittances** cheaply and keep its budget balanced.
- A steady, high rupee also kept India's **sterling loans** safe in the eyes of the London money market, so India stayed **creditworthy** and could borrow there at low interest. This is option **(a)**.

Group	Effect of the 18d (overvalued) rupee
British government and Home Charges	Fewer rupees needed to remit each pound; sterling debt easier to service
British manufacturers	Their goods became cheaper in India
Indian exporters, cotton and jute growers	Got fewer rupees for the same sterling price; exports discouraged
Indian industry	Faced cheaper imports; less protection

The other options

- **(b) Indian importers:** importers did gain from cheaper foreign goods, but this was a **side effect**. The policy was framed to protect the **Home Charges** and British interests, not to help Indian traders. The gain went mainly to **British exporters** selling in India.
- **(c) Export of cotton:** an overvalued rupee **discourages exports**, because foreign buyers have to pay more for Indian cotton. Indian cotton growers and the Bombay mill-owners were among the **strongest critics** of the 18d ratio.
- **(d) Depreciation against gold:** the commission did link the rupee to gold through the gold bullion standard, but the question asks why the **rupee-sterling** rate was fixed high. The aim was a **strong rupee for remittances**, not a guard against falling gold value. When Britain left the gold standard in **September 1931**, the rupee was simply **tied to sterling at 1s 6d**, which shows that the sterling link, not gold, was what mattered.

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Q. Which one of the following statements about the Eka Movement and Bardoli Satyagraha is correct?

(a) The Eka Movement was throughout supported and organized by the Congress while Bardoli Satyagraha was initially independent of Congress influence and was only in the last stages supported by the Congress.
(b) The Eka Movement was provided leadership by the taluqdars of Awadh, whereas the Bardoli Satyagraha was a movement of the landless labourers.
(c) The Bardoli Satyagraha was a campaign against the enhancement of land revenue, while the Eka Movement was a protest against excessive extraction of rents.
(d) The Eka Movement was located in the Varanasi and Mirzapur districts of the present-day U.P., while the Bardoli Satyagraha took place in Saurashtra.

> **Answer: (c) The Bardoli Satyagraha was a campaign against the enhancement of land revenue, while the Eka Movement was a protest against excessive extraction of rents.**

Eka (Unity) Movement, 1921–22

- The **Eka Movement** arose at the end of **1921** in the northern districts of **Awadh**: **Hardoi, Bahraich and Sitapur** (and spread to Barabanki and Lucknow). It followed the **Awadh Kisan Sabha** agitation of 1920–21 led by **Baba Ramchandra**.
- **Grievances:** rents were **about 50% higher** than the recorded rent; **thekedars** (rent collectors) were oppressive; and **share-rents** (rent paid in grain) were common. So it was a protest against **excessive rents**, not against government land revenue.
- **Eka meetings** began with a religious ritual: peasants vowed to pay **only the recorded rent**, to pay it on time, not to leave their land when evicted, not to do **begar** (forced labour) and to stand by the decisions of the panchayats.
- It was **started by Congress and Khilafat leaders**, but soon came under **grassroots leaders**, above all **Madari Pasi** (from a low caste), and other low-caste peasants. It moved away from Congress discipline of non-violence, and was **put down by March 1922** through severe repression.

Bardoli Satyagraha, 1928

- **Bardoli** taluka is in **Surat district, south Gujarat**. In **1926–27** the Bombay government **raised the land revenue by about 30%** (later cut to **21.97%**).
- **Vallabhbhai Patel** led the campaign from **February 1928**: peasants refused to pay the enhanced revenue. Its women gave him the title **"Sardar"**. Congress workers had been doing **constructive work** in Bardoli since 1922 (for example among the **Kaliparaj** tribal people), so the campaign was **Congress-led from the start**.
- The **Maxwell-Broomfield inquiry** later found the increase unjustified and reduced it to **6.03%**. Bardoli became a model of a **non-violent peasant struggle** against **land revenue enhancement**.

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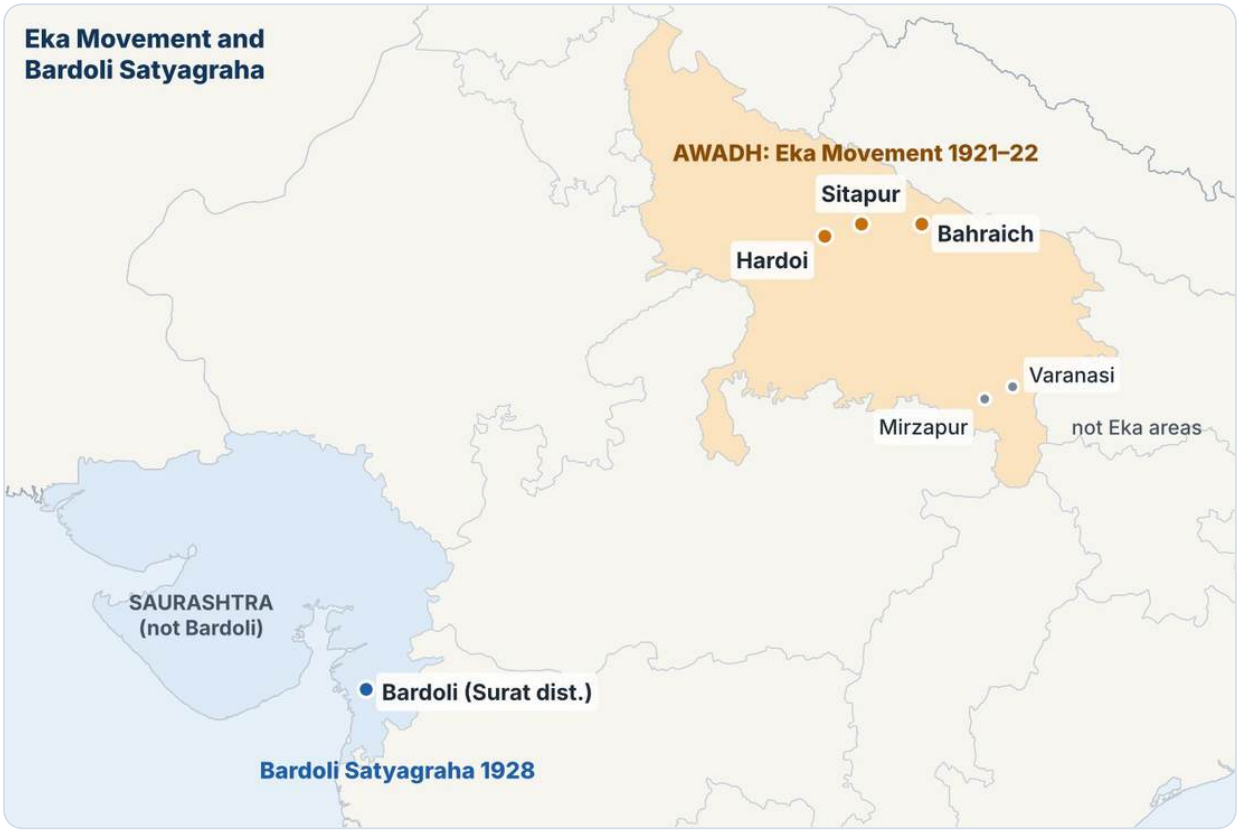

Where the Eka Movement and the Bardoli Satyagraha took place

Feature	Eka Movement	Bardoli Satyagraha
Year	1921–22	1928
Region	Northern Awadh: Hardoi, Bahraich, Sitapur	Bardoli taluka, Surat district, Gujarat
Against	High rents, thekedars, begar (landlords)	30% rise in land revenue (government)
Leaders	Congress-Khilafat at first; then Madari Pasi	Vallabhbhai Patel (Congress)
Outcome	Crushed by March 1922	Enhancement cut to 6.03%

The other options

- **(a)** reverses the facts. Eka **began** with Congress help but slipped **out of Congress control** under Madari Pasi. Bardoli was **Congress-led throughout**, under Patel.
- **(b)** Eka was **against the taluqdars** and landlords, so taluqdars could not lead it. Bardoli was a struggle of **landholding peasants** (mostly **Patidar** cultivators) who paid land revenue, not of landless labourers.
- **(d)** Eka was in **Hardoi, Bahraich and Sitapur**, not Varanasi and Mirzapur. Bardoli is in **south Gujarat (Surat)**, not **Saurashtra** (the Kathiawar peninsula).

Q. Which of the following factors contributed to the formation of the Forward Bloc by Subhas Chandra Bose in 1939?

1. Bose failed to win the confidence of Mahatma Gandhi.

2. The Congress Left was disunited and failed to support Bose.

3. The Communists did not support Bose in his endeavours.

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4. The supporters of M.N. Roy and socialist leaders like Jayaprakash Narayan preferred Congress unity to supporting Bose.

Select the answer using the code given below:

(a) 1, 2 and 3
(b) 1, 2 and 4
(c) 1, 3 and 4
(d) 2 and 4 only

> **Answer: (b) 1, 2 and 4**

From Tripuri to the Forward Bloc

- Bose was **Congress President at Haripura (1938)**. In **January 1939** he stood again and **defeated Pattabhi Sitaramayya**, Gandhi's candidate, by **1,580 votes to 1,377**. Gandhi said that Pattabhi's defeat was **"more mine than his"**.
- In **February 1939**, **12 of the 15** members of the Congress Working Committee (including Patel, Rajendra Prasad and Azad) **resigned**; Nehru stepped down separately. At the **Tripuri session (March 1939)**, the **Pant resolution** asked Bose to name his Working Committee **"in accordance with the wishes of Gandhiji"**.
- Gandhi would not agree to a joint committee, and Bose **resigned as President in April 1939**; **Rajendra Prasad** took his place. On **3 May 1939** Bose formed the **Forward Bloc** inside the Congress, to rally the Left. In **August 1939** he was removed from the presidentship of the Bengal Congress and barred from Congress office for three years.

Statement by statement

- **Statement 1 is correct:** Bose wanted an **ultimatum to the British** and a mass struggle; Gandhi felt the country was not ready. Bose **could not win Gandhi's confidence**, and without it he could not run the Congress.
- **Statement 2 is correct:** the **Congress Left** (Congress Socialists, Communists, Royists, Kisan Sabha leaders and Nehru) was **divided** and did not stand behind Bose against the Gandhian leadership at Tripuri.
- **Statement 3 is not correct:** the **Communists backed Bose** in the 1939 presidential contest, and they later joined the **Left Consolidation Committee** that Bose set up in **June 1939** with other Left groups. They were not the factor that pushed him to form the Bloc. (They did avoid a **split** at Tripuri, but the statement that they did not support him is too sweeping.)
- **Statement 4 is correct: Jayaprakash Narayan** and the **Congress Socialist Party** stayed **neutral** on the Pant resolution, and **M.N. Roy's** followers also put **Congress unity** first, because a split on the eve of war would have weakened the national movement.
- So statements **1, 2 and 4** contributed, and the answer is **(b)**.

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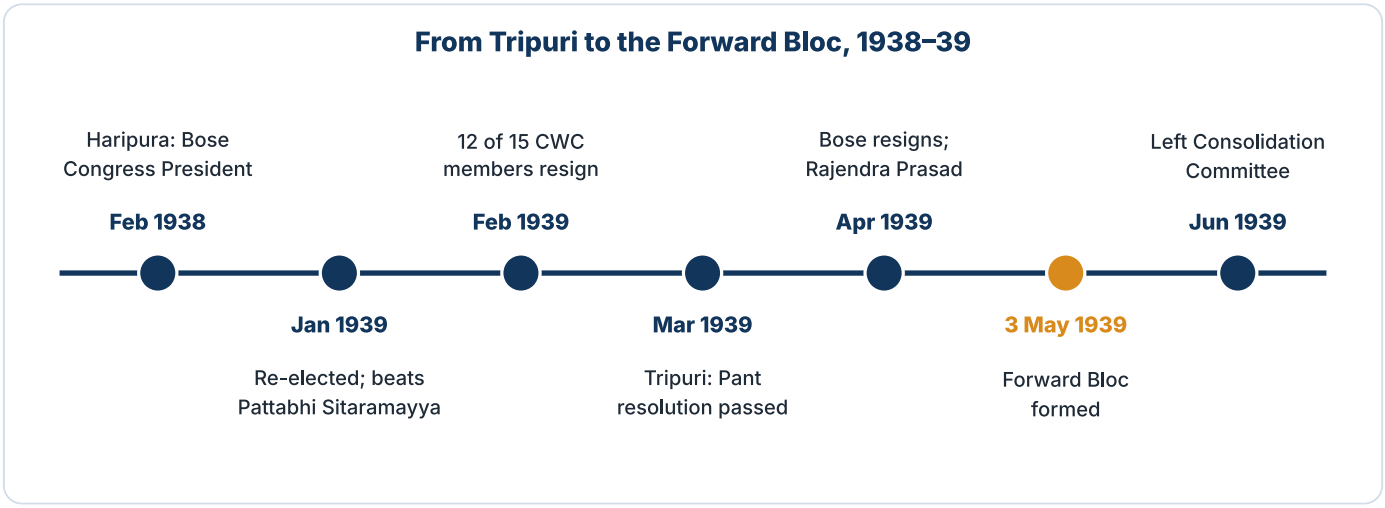

Events leading to the Forward Bloc, 1938–39

Q. Consider the following statements regarding the British policy in Awadh immediately after its annexation in 1856:

1. The taluqdars were dispossessed of their estates but allowed to retain their arms and forts.

2. A Summary Revenue Settlement was made in 1856 assuming that the taluqdars were outsiders.

3. The British believed in taking revenue directly from the peasants by removing the taluqdars.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

(a) 2 and 3 only
(b) 1 and 3 only
(c) 1, 2 and 3
(d) 2 only

Answer: (a) 2 and 3 only

Annexation of Awadh and the Summary Settlement

- **Awadh was annexed in February 1856** by **Lord Dalhousie** on the ground of **misgovernment** (not the Doctrine of Lapse). **Nawab Wajid Ali Shah** was deposed and sent to **Calcutta**.
- The **taluqdars** of Awadh were powerful landholders who had **armed retainers** and **forts**. Right after annexation the British **disarmed them, disbanded their armies and destroyed their forts**. So **statement 1 is wrong**: they were not allowed to keep their arms and forts.
- The **Summary Settlement of 1856** assumed that the taluqdars were **interlopers (outsiders)** with **no permanent stake in the land**, who had gained their estates by **force and fraud**. Many taluqdars were **dispossessed**: they lost **more than half** the villages they had held before annexation. **Statement 2 is correct.**
- The British hoped that by **removing the taluqdars** they could **settle the land directly with the cultivators** (the actual owners in their view), which would **raise government revenue** and win the peasants' loyalty. **Statement 3 is correct.**

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What followed

- The plan backfired. Peasants did not gain: the **revenue demand was over-assessed**, and the old ties with the taluqdars remained. In **1857**, Awadh saw one of the **most widespread revolts**, with taluqdars and peasants fighting together; **Begum Hazrat Mahal** led it at **Lucknow**.
- After 1857 the British **reversed the policy**: loyal taluqdars were **given back their estates through sanads** and became allies of the Raj. This is a good example of how annexation and land policy fed the Revolt.

Q. Consider the following assertion : The genesis of political alliances based on community lay in the very nature of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms, 1919.

Which of the following statements support/supports the above assertion?

1. Reforms retained and extended the principle of separate electorates.

2. Separate electorates were supposed to counter Indian nationalism, which was growing stronger.

3. Deprived classes rallied around the favours inherent in separate electorates.

Select the answer using the code given below :

(a) 1 only
(b) 2 and 3 only
(c) 1 and 2 only
(d) 1, 2 and 3

> **Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3**

Separate electorates under the 1919 reforms

- The **Montagu-Chelmsford Report (1918)** led to the **Government of India Act, 1919**. It introduced **dyarchy** in the provinces and a **bicameral** central legislature, and **widened the franchise** (still limited by property and tax).
- **Separate electorates for Muslims** began with the **Indian Councils Act, 1909** (Morley-Minto). The 1919 Act **retained** them and **extended** the principle to **Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians and Europeans**. Seats were also **reserved for non-Brahmins in Madras** and for the **Marathas in Bombay**. **Statement 1 supports the assertion.**
- The Montagu-Chelmsford Report itself **criticised communal electorates** as harmful to self-government, but kept them, partly because the **Lucknow Pact (1916)** had accepted them. British officials saw them as a way to **divide and balance** a nationalism that had grown stronger after the **Home Rule movement**. **Statement 2 supports the assertion.**
- Groups that gained seats or **special representation**, such as **non-Brahmins** (the **Justice Party** won the first Madras elections in 1920) and the **depressed classes**, organised as **communities** to secure these benefits. This laid the ground for **community-based political alliances** in the 1920s and 1930s. **Statement 3 supports the assertion.**

Act	Communal or special representation

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Indian Councils Act, 1909	Separate electorates for Muslims
Government of India Act, 1919	Extended to Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans; reserved seats for non-Brahmins (Madras), Marathas (Bombay)
Communal Award, 1932	Extended to the depressed classes (changed by the Poona Pact, 1932)
Government of India Act, 1935	Extended further to women, labour and others

- All three statements support the assertion, so the answer is **(d)**.

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