

History & Art and Culture: August – December 2024

Hampi's Heritage and Its Modern Challenges

Context: Preserving Hampi requires balancing the conservation of its ancient ruins with the needs of its local communities.

Hampi

- It is situated in the Bellary District, **Central Karnataka**, on the banks of the **Tungabhadra River**.



- It was the capital of the **Vijayanagara Empire**, one of the most significant Hindu empires in South India, which flourished from the 14th to the 16th century. It was designated a **World Heritage Site** in 1986.
- Vijayanagara architecture combined elements of **Chola, Hoysala, Pandya, Chalukya styles**, and **Indo-Islamic influences**.
- Notable features include the mythical Yali (horse) carvings and the Kalyan Mandap (a central pavilion for marriage ceremonies).
- Key architectural remains include the **Mahanavami Dibba** (a ceremonial platform), various ponds and tanks, and rows of pillared Mandapas.
- The temples are famous for their large dimensions, elaborate ornamentation, bold carvings, and stately pillars, often depicting scenes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Notable temples include:**
 - ❖ **Virupaksha Temple:** An important Shiva temple.
 - ❖ **Vittala Temple Complex:** Known for its Stone Chariot and musical pillars.



- ❖ **Hazara Rama Temple:** Noted for its bas-reliefs of the Ramayana.
- ❖ **Lakshmi Narasimha Temple:** Features a giant monolithic statue of Narasimha.
- ❖ **Achyutaraya Temple:** A grand temple with intricate sculptures.
- Hampi was known for its wide chariot streets lined with pillared Mandapas and a network of bazaars.
- Due to the arid region, **sophisticated water management systems** were developed, including the Kamalapuram tank and the Hiriya canal, to support agriculture and urban water needs.
- Its ruins were first documented in the 1800s by an engineer and antiquarian **Colonel Colin Mackenzie**.

Vijayanagara Empire

- Established in **1336 A.D.** by brothers **Harihara** and **Bukka Raya**, who made Hampi the capital city.
- Four main dynasties ruled the empire: **Sangama, Saluva, Tuluva, Aravidu**.
- At its height, the empire dominated South India, expanded into the Deccan, and annexed Odisha.
- It became a major power and pushed the Deccan sultans beyond the **Tungabhadra-Krishna River region**. The economy was based on agriculture and thriving trade.
- Major exports included spices, textiles, and precious stones. Coins were minted in gold, silver, copper, and brass.
- The empire declined after a major defeat at the Battle of Talikota in 1565.

Conservation Efforts

- **UNESCO Recognition:** Hampi's status as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** since 1986 has boosted preservation efforts.
- **Restoration Projects:** Ongoing programs focus on restoring and preserving Hampi's ruins and temples.
- **Funding and Partnerships:** Conservation is supported by government, international organisations, and conservationists.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Public education promotes responsible tourism and highlights the importance of preserving Hampi.
- **Infrastructure Improvements:** Enhanced infrastructure helps manage tourist impact and supports conservation.

Local Impact and Community Challenges

- **Economic Dependence:** The local economy heavily relies on tourism, which can lead to economic instability if tourist numbers fluctuate.
- **Cultural Impact:** Increased tourism can strain local traditions and disrupt the community's cultural fabric.
- **Infrastructure Strain:** Rising visitor numbers pressure local infrastructure, including transportation and sanitation facilities.
- **Environmental Degradation:** High foot traffic and development projects can damage historical sites and the natural environment.
- **Livelihood Changes:** Traditional livelihoods, such as agriculture, may be overshadowed by tourism-driven economic activities.
- **Community Displacement:** Development and conservation efforts sometimes lead to the displacement of local residents or changes in their way of life.

Quarrying near Hampi

Context: Increased stone quarrying near Hampi (between Bukkasagara and Anegundi) and the **Tungabhadra River** has raised safety concerns as it **threatens the unique rock formations** and landscape of the World Heritage Site (WHS).

- Despite the **Tungabhadra Otter Conservation Reserve's** signboard, quarrying continues and the impact of quarrying on the site's heritage and natural beauty is worrisome.



Impacts

- **Destruction of Heritage:** Damages the ancient rock formations and monuments, affecting the historical and cultural value of Hampi.
- **Safety Concerns:** Use of explosives poses risks to the structural integrity of monuments and to tourists.
- **Environmental Damage:** Disrupts the natural landscape and ecosystems, including the **otter habitats**.
- **Tourism Impact:** Detracts from the aesthetic and recreational experience for visitors.
- **Conservation Challenges:** Undermines conservation efforts for the WHS and the local wildlife.

Examples of Heritage Sites Damaged Due to Human Activities

- **Mogao Caves, China:** While not completely lost, the Mogao Caves have faced damage from nearby construction and increased tourism, leading to significant preservation challenges.
- **Ancient City of Aleppo, Syria:** Development and conflict have caused extensive damage to this site, including the destruction of historic buildings and infrastructure.
- **Kakadu National Park, Australia:** Mining and other industrial activities have impacted parts of this site, leading to concerns about damage to its cultural and environmental values.
- **Sukhothai, Thailand:** Some areas of the Sukhothai Historical Park have experienced damage from surrounding development and tourism pressures.

Tungabhadra Otter Conservation Reserve

- The reserve spans from Mudlapura village to Kampli in Ballari district and **includes the World Heritage site of Hampi** and was officially notified in **2016**.
- The reserve focuses on conserving **smooth-coated otters** (*Lutrogale perspicillata*) and **small-clawed otters** (*Aonyx cinerea*), both classified as **Vulnerable** by the IUCN Red List.
- Otters defecate as a group to mark territory and ward off intruders (key survival behavior).



Vishalgad Fort

Context: Vishalgad Fort has faced tensions as right-wing groups target local muslim residents over alleged encroachments.

- **Vishalgad Fort**, also known as **Khelna** or **Khilna**, was a significant fort of the **Maratha Empire**.
- The fort, built by **Shilahara king Marsinh** in **1058**, is situated on a hilltop in the **Sahyadri mountain ranges** and was captured by **Seuna Yadavas of Devagiri** in **1209**.
- It fell under the **Khilji dynasty** after **Allauddin Khilji** defeated the Seuna Yadavas in **1309**.
- It was later ruled by the **Vijayanagar Empire** and then the **Adilshahi dynasty**.
- It was captured by **Shivaji** in **1659** and renamed **Vishalgad**, meaning "grand fort."
- Notable sites include the **Dargah of Hazrat Sayed Malik Rehan Meera Saheb** and the tombs of **Phulaji** and **Baji Prabhu Deshpande**, who both served under Shivaji.

Other Examples of Illegal Encroachments Near Monuments

- **Taj Mahal, Agra:** Violates environmental guidelines.
- **Jama Masjid, Delhi:** Causes congestion and obstruct access, which impacts the site's visual integrity.
- **Qutub Minar, Delhi:** Affects aesthetics and accessibility.
- **Charminar, Hyderabad:** Increase pollution and lead to traffic congestion around the monument.
- **Golconda Fort, Hyderabad:** Deteriorate the fort's structure, making preservation difficult.
- **Hampi, Karnataka:** Increased stone quarrying threatens unique rock formations and the landscape.

Steps Taken by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- ASI has initiated **legal proceedings** to remove unauthorized structures and sought court interventions to enforce preservation laws (The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958).
- It has installed **fences** and **demarkated boundaries** around protected monuments and conducts **public awareness** programs and **works with local governments**.

Why These Measures Are Not Fully Effective?

- **Weak Enforcement:** Despite legal actions, enforcement remains weak, with local authorities often unable or unwilling to remove encroachments.
- **Political Influence:** Encroachments are sometimes backed by political interests.
- **Lack of Resources:** To monitor all heritage sites effectively.
- **Public Apathy:** Local communities may not fully understand the importance of preservation, leading to continued encroachments despite awareness efforts.
- **Judicial Delays:** Legal processes are often slow, leading to prolonged battles over encroachment cases.

Gotipua Dance

Context: There is a declining participation in the Gotipua dance of **Odisha**.

- Gotipua Dance emerged in **Odisha** in the **16th century**, during **Bhoi king Rama Chandra Dev**.
- In the Oriya language, Goti means single and Pua means boy.

- It is developed as a **male counterpart** (boys dressed as girls) to the declining **Mahari tradition** (a ritualistic dance performed by Devadasis at the Jagannatha temple in Puri).
- It is considered a **precursor to the Odissi dance**.
- **Dance Style:** There are two primary postures: **Tribhangi** (three bends at the head, torso, and knees) and **Chouka** (a square-like stance symbolizing Lord Jagannath). Dancers sing while performing.
 - ❖ **Upper torso movements** resemble the **waves of the Odisha** coastline.
- Training involves rigorous practice in **singing, dancing, yoga, and acrobatics**.
- Boys maintain **long hair**, wear **flower garlands**, and apply **white and red powders** for makeup.
- It is performed in praise of **Lord Jagannath** and **Lord Krishna**.
- Dancers typically **retire upon reaching puberty** as they struggle to maintain flexibility and lose their feminine character.
- Sculptures in the Konark Sun Temple and **Puri Jagannath Temple** illustrate this ancient tradition.



Kalamezhuthu (Dhulee Chithram)

Context: A Kalamezhuthu workshop organised by the Maharaja's College, Kerala.

- **Kalamezhuthu** is a communal **ritual art** widely believed to have originated in the **9th century AD** to worship the great Gods of the land, including **Bhadraakali, Ayyappan** and **Vettakkorumakan**.
- It is also known as **Kalam Pattu, Kalamezhuthu Pattu, Dhumakkali** in Kerala and **Kalam Karuppai** in Tamil Nadu. **Only natural products** are used for the ritual to make the **Kalam**.
- The artists have traditionally belonged to the **Kurups, Theyyampadi Nambiars, Theyyadi Nambiars, and Theyyadi Unnis** communities, each with its **own unique kalam traits**.
- It requires a lot of concentration, as it must be drawn according to religious guidelines similar to Thangka paintings. **Coloured powders** extracted from plants are used to make beautiful drawings **on the floor**.
- These are **erased at the end of the ritual**, with the rhythms of various **musical instruments** like the **ilathalam, veekkanchenda, kuzhal, kombu** and **chenda**, acting as accompaniment.

Taxation During Cholas

Context: Stone inscriptions in temple walls of Tamil Nadu details the **land surveys** conducted by the Cholas. Tax **assessments** were conducted **periodically** and collected through **local grandees**.

- **Rajakulavar** (lordly families) **avoided tax** by donating lands to religious institutions or by appointing their dependents as cultivators.

Types of lands

- **Vellanvagai:** Land of non-Brahmin farmers (Taxed).
- **Brahmadeya:** Land gifted to Brahmanas (Tax exempted).
- **Shalabhoga:** Land for school (Tax exempted).
- **Devadana, Tirunamattukkani:** Land gifted to temples (Tax exempted).
- **Pallichchandam:** Land for Jain institutions (Tax exempted).

Related Terms

- **Puravuvvari-tinaikkalam:** Department of land revenue.
- **Naduvagaiseykira:** The surveyors of the land from the landholding communities.
- **Ur:** General assembly of the village.
- **Urar:** Landholders in the village who played a crucial role in village administration.

Important Taxes

- **Kudimai:** Primary source of revenue collected from cultivators as rent.
- **Opati:** Levied and collected by the king and local chiefs.
- **Iraikattina-nellu:** Tax paid in kind (paddy or rice).
- **Vetti:** A form of forced labor, where people had to work for the king or landlords without pay.
- **Eriyam tax:** Collected by village assemblies for maintenance and repairing of irrigation tanks.

Sarojini Naidu

Context: The article deals with a speech delivered by **Sarojini Naidu** in the **Constituent Assembly** on **July 22, 1947**, reflecting on the significance of the **newly adopted Indian flag** and national unity.





Sarojini Naidu's Life and Contributions

- She was born in **Hyderabad** on **February 13, 1879**, and pursued her degrees from **King's College** (London) and **Girton College** (Cambridge).
- She started as an influential speaker for Indian independence, women's rights, and education in **1904**.
- She addressed the **Indian National Congress (INC)** and **Indian Social Conference** in Calcutta in **1906**.
- She received the **Kaisar-i-Hind Medal** in **1911** for flood relief work, which she **returned in 1919** to protest the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.
- She **joined Mahatma Gandhi** in **1914**, playing a significant role in organizing non-violent resistance.
- **Women's Rights Activism:** In **1917**, co-founded the **Women's Indian Association** with **Muthulakshmi Reddy**; advocated for universal suffrage in London with **Annie Besant**.
- She maintained close contacts with the **All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC)**, which was founded on **October 31, 1920**.
- She represented the Indian National Congress at the **East African Indian National Congress** in **1924**.
- She was elected as the **first Indian woman president of INC** in **1925**.
- She was a founding member of **All India Women's Conference** (founded by Margaret Cousins in 1927).
- **Civil Disobedience:** Imprisoned for participating in the Salt Satyagraha in **1930** (Darasana, Gujarat) and later during the Quit India Movement in **1942**.
- She also participated in the **second Round Table Conference** in **1931** as a representative of Indian women.
- In 1947, she was appointed as **United Province's first female governor** and advocated for **Hindu-Muslim unity** and worked to ensure a peaceful partition process, despite opposing the division.

Literary Achievements

- **Nightingale of India:** Earned the title for her poetic prowess, beginning her writing journey at 12.
- **Key Publications:** **The Golden Threshold (1905)**, **The Bird of Time (1915)**, **The Broken Wing (1919)**, **The Sceptred Flute (1948)**, **The Feather of the Dawn (1961)**, posthumously edited by her daughter).

The Indian National Flag

- Officially adopted on **July 22, 1947**; initially designed by **Pinkali Venkayya**.

Specifications

- The **saffron** symbolizes strength and courage, while, **white** represents peace and truth. The **green** colour denotes fertility and growth.
- **Ashoka Chakra:** Navy blue wheel with 24 spokes, representing the eternal nature of law and order.
- **Ratio:** Rectangular with a **3:2 length-to-width ratio**.

Historical Milestones

- **1906:** **First flag** hoisted in **Kolkata**, featuring red, yellow, and green stripes with Vande Mataram.
- **1907:** **Madame Cama's** group hoisted an Indian flag in Germany.
- **1917:** **Annie Besant** and **Tilak** introduced a flag with red and green stripes and a Union Jack.
- **1931:** Congress adopted the design by Venkayya, adding **saffron** (earlier red) and the **Ashoka Chakra**.



Legal Aspects

- The **Flag Code of India (2002)** governs its display and use.
- **Article 51A(a)** mandates respect for the flag and anthem.
- Under the **Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act**, offenses related to the flag or anthem result in a 6-year election disqualification.

Borra Caves

Context: Borra Caves near **Visakhapatnam** to get a facelift under **Swadesh Darshan 2.0**.

About Borra Caves

Location: Located on the Eastern Ghats in **Ananthagiri hills** of **Araku Valley** in **Andhra Pradesh**. It is among the **deepest** and **largest caves in India**.

Discovered by: **William King George** of the Geological Survey of India.

It was formed millions of years ago by the water activity of the **Gosthani River**.

The caves are basically **karstic limestone structures** extending to a depth of 80 meters.

A naturally formed Shivling inside the caves is worshipped by local tribal communities.

Excavations have unearthed stone **tools** dating back to the **Paleolithic age** (30,000-50,000 years ago), indicating early human habitation.

Swadesh Darshan Scheme 2.0

Revamped Scheme: The Ministry of Tourism has revamped its Swadesh Darshan scheme as Swadesh Darshan 2.0 for the development of sustainable and responsible tourist destinations covering tourism and allied infrastructure, tourism services, human capital development, destination management.

Private Sector Investment: Encourage increased investment in tourism and hospitality.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP): Promote PPPs for the operation and maintenance of assets created under the scheme.

Gingee Fort

Context: **Gingee Fort, Tamil Nadu** is a **potential World Heritage Site** in **2024-25**.

About Gingee Fort (Senji Fort / Troy of the East)

Originally constructed by **Anandakonar** around **1190 AD**. Gingee Fort is historically significant in battles involving the **Marathas, Mughals, Vijayanagar Nayaks**, and the **British**.

Features

Three Hillocks: Spans across three hills—Rajagiri, Krishnagiri & Chandrayandurg—each with its citadel.

Architectural Marvels: Seven-storeyed **Kalyana Mahal** (marriage hall), granaries, temples (like the **Kamalakanni Amman Temple**).

Defensive Structures: Strategic location atop hills provided **natural defences** against invasions.



Sindhudurg Fort

Context: The collapse of the **35-foot Shivaji Maharaj statue** sharply contrasts with the resilience of the **357-year-old Sindhudurg Fort**.

Background for building Sindhudurg Fort

Construction: **Hiroji Indulkar**, an architect expert, oversaw the fort's construction. The **construction** of the fort **began in 1664** and took **three years** to complete.

Location: Shivaji Maharaj chose **Kurte Island** for its strategic position and natural defences. The **rugged coastline** made it difficult for enemy ships to approach, allowing for better control over maritime routes.

Architectural Features: Thick walls, a **serpentine design**, **hidden entrances** and watchtowers.

The fort served as a naval base to **protect Maratha interests** and enhance **maritime trade**. It was built to counter the dominance of **Siddis, Portuguese, English, Dutch & French** in the Konkan region.

Restoration of Kumaranallur Temple Murals

Context: The **Kumaranallur Devi temple** in Kottayam, **Kerala**, is undergoing a restoration project.

Historical Significance of Temple and its Murals

Dates back to the 10th century during **King Cheraman Perumal's** reign. It features a rare '**Sree Chakra**' style in its **Naalambalam** and **Sreekovil**. This **ring-like structure with a handle** is a rare architectural element and exemplifies a blend of devotion and artistic brilliance.

The temple's murals are spread across **14 distinct sections**, known as **Chithrakandas**. These vivid artworks primarily depict scenes from the Indian epics **Ramayana** and **Mahabharata**. The mural series begins on the right side of the temple with an image of **Karthyayani Devi**, the main deity of the temple.

Restoration Process

These intricate artworks, which have **darkened and faded with age**, are being skillfully restored to their former glory by renowned mural artist **Gopi Chavayur**.

Gopi Chavayur first revived these murals in 1997 when they had deteriorated beyond recognition. During that initial restoration, 12 panels were recreated using traditional techniques and natural pigments.

The first restoration strictly adheres to the **five traditional colours**: ochre red, ochre yellow, dark green, white, and black, reflecting the importance of **lines over colours** in Kerala-style mural paintings.

While the murals adhere to traditional colour schemes, they feature **unique elements**. For example, **Goddess Parvathy** is wearing a **jacket** and **saree**, which is diverging from traditional attire.

Sakthan Thampuran

Context: A statue of **Sakthan Thampuran** was knocked over by a state transport bus.

Sakthan Thampuran: The Powerful Ruler of Cochin

Born as **Raja Rama Varma Kunjipillai** (Rama Varma IX) in 1751 to Ambika Thampuran and Chendose Aniyam Namboodiri of the Cochin royal family. He was raised by his aunt, who named him "**Sakthan**" (meaning "**powerful**"). He was a significant ruler of the **Cochin kingdom** from 1790 to 1805.

The title "**Thampuran**" is believed to be derived from the Sanskrit word "**samrat**," meaning **emperor**.



*The **Cochin kingdom**, which was part of the **Late Chera Empire**, encompassed the regions between Ponnani in Malappuram and Thottappally in Alappuzha in present-day Kerala.*

Political Strategies

He advised maintaining **friendly relations** with both the **Dutch** and **English traders**.

He orchestrated Mysore's attempt to invade the Travancore kingdom, which led to the **Powney treaty** and it freed the Cochin kingdom from its allegiance to Mysore and formalised its relations with the British.

Reforms and Governance

He **abolished** the institution of **Yogiatrippads**, who were spiritual heads of major temples and had previously conspired against the Cochin king. He **entrusted temple management** to the **government**.

He established a reputation for maintaining law and order, significantly **reducing crime** in his kingdom.

He personally oversaw **revenue management**, strengthening the kingdom's finances.

In 1797, he initiated the **Thrissur Pooram**, which has since become one of Kerala's most famous temple festivals. This event was conceived as an alternative to the **Arattupuzha Pooram** and provided an opportunity for major temples in Thrissur to pay respects to **Lord Shiva** at the **Vadakkumnathan Temple**.

Development of Thrissur

He moved the **capital** of the Cochin kingdom **from Thrippunithura to Thrissur**.

He developed the **Thekkinkadu Maidanam** and the surrounding Swaraj Round, which became the foundation for the city's road system and infrastructure.

Great Stupa of Sanchi

Context: **Sanchi's Great Stupa East Gate** replica installed at **Humboldt Forum Museum** in Berlin.

Historical Background

It was commissioned by Emperor **Ashoka** to house the **relics of the Buddha**. After **embracing Buddhism** following the **Kalinga War**, Ashoka sought to promote the faith through the construction of stupas.

The original stupa was a simple hemispherical dome made of **brick and mud mortar**, estimated to be half the size of the current structure. It was later enlarged and **renovated**, particularly during the **Sunga dynasty** (184-72 BCE), which introduced **local sandstone** and **decorative elements**.

Architectural Features

Stupa features a **hemispherical dome**, symbolizing the **cosmic mountain**, and is crowned with a **chhatra (umbrella)**, representing the **Three Jewels of Buddhism**: the **Buddha**, the **Dharma**, and the **Sangha**.

A **circular terrace** surrounds the stupa for **circumambulation**, emphasizing the **ritualistic aspect** of the structure. **Four** elaborately carved **Toranas (gateways)** were added during the **Satavahana dynasty** in the 1st century BCE. These toranas are adorned with intricate bas-reliefs depicting scenes from the **Buddha's life** and **Jataka tales**, showcasing the artistic excellence of the period.

Rediscovery and Restoration

Rediscovered by British officer **Henry Taylor** in **1818**. Formal **excavations** began in **1851** under **Alexander Cunningham**. In **1989**, Sanchi was designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

Harappan civilisation

Context: In 1924, **John Marshall**, then-Director General of the ASI, announced the discovery of the “**civilisation of the Indus Valley**” in “**The Illustrated London News**”.

The Harappan civilisation spread across modern **Pakistan**, northwest **India**, and **Afghanistan**, with key sites like **Harappa**, **Mohenjo-Daro**, Rakhigarhi, and Dholavira.

Characteristics

Urban Planning: Harappans designed well-organized cities with grid layouts, advanced drainage systems, and standardised bricks.

Craftsmanship: They produced intricate seals, pottery, and jewellery, notably unique steatite seals with animal motifs and undeciphered script.

Trade Networks: The civilisation engaged in extensive trade, as evidenced by artefacts made of lapis lazuli and carnelian from distant regions.

Enigmas

Undeciphered Language: The Indus script has **400-600 symbols** and remains undeciphered due to the absence of bilingual inscriptions.

Spiritual Practices: Understanding of Harappan religious beliefs is **limited**. Seals show possible **deities**, but the **lack of temples** renders much uncertain.

Causes of Collapse: The decline of the Harappan civilisation around **1900 BCE** is debated, with unclear factors including **climate change**, **tectonic activity**, **resource overexploitation**, and **invasions**.

Extent of Trade: Evidence shows trade with Mesopotamia and other regions, but the details of commodities exchanged and their **impact** on Harappan society remain **unclear**.

Significance

Filling Historical Gaps: The discovery of the Harappan civilisation extended the timeline of settled life in South Asia by over 3,000 years, **reshaping historical narratives about urbanisation**.

Cultural and Economic Insights: The Harappans were skilled artisans in bead-making, pottery, and metallurgy, enhancing their **economic strength and cultural identity**.

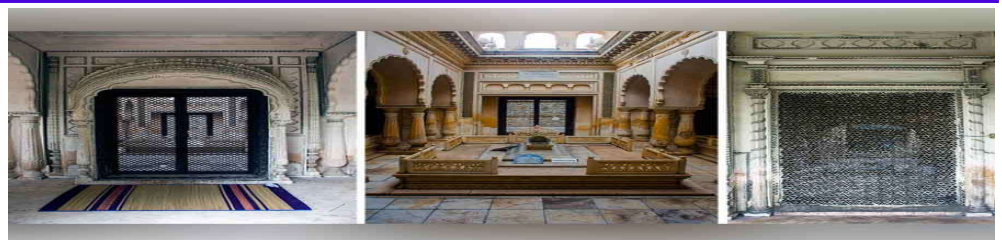
Influence on Subsequent Civilizations: The Harappan civilisation influenced later South Asian cultures through its **urban practices**, **agricultural techniques**, and **possibly religious beliefs**.

Sustainability Practices: The Harappans showcased advanced water management with **drainage systems** and likely **rainwater harvesting**, highlighting sustainable agricultural practices.

Trade with West Asia: Evidence shows Harappans had maritime trade links with Mesopotamia and the Arabian Peninsula, **indicating advanced navigation skills**.

Paigah tombs of Hyderabad

Context: The 200-year-old **Hyderabad's Paigah tombs** are now undergoing restoration.





Who Were the Paigahs?

Historical Background: The Paigahs were a **noble family** who accompanied Emperor **Aurangzeb** during his conquest of the Deccan region.

Founder: **Shams-ul-Umra I**, known as **Nawaz Abul Fatah Khan Tegh**, established the **House of Paigah**.

Matrimonial Alliances: Their ties with the **Nizams** were strengthened through strategic marriages.

Wealth and Influence: The Paigahs were reputed to be wealthier than the average Maharajah in India.

Palaces: The Paigahs constructed several notable palaces in Hyderabad, Such as Falaknuma Palace, Asman Garh Palace, Khursheed Jah Devdi, Vicar-ul-Umarahi Palace.

Historical Importance

The **Paigahs**, who married the daughters of the Nizams, were the **highest-ranking nobles** in the princely state of **Hyderabad**, second **only** to the **Nizams**.

They were the **only noble family permitted** by the Sultan to **maintain a private army**.

About the Paigah Tombs Complex

Also known as **Maqbara Shams al-Umara**. They are the final resting places of the Paigah nobility.

The tombs are a prime example of **Indo-Saracenic architecture**, blending **Asaf Jah** and **Rajputani styles**.

Built of **white marble**, the tombs feature intricately designed interiors. The structures are decorated with stucco work, representing Mughal, Greek, Persian, Asaf Jahi, Rajasthani, and Deccani styles.

The famous **'Jali' work** adds to the tombs' allure. Each tomb is uniquely designed with a distinct style.

Stucco, a construction material made of aggregates, a binder, and water, is used as a decorative coating for walls and ceilings and a sculptural and artistic material in architecture.

*The **Department of Heritage Telangana** and the **Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC)** are handling the project to restore the necropolis of one of Hyderabad's most powerful noble families. The **US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation** is helping to conserve six of the 14 monuments.*

The Battle of Saragarhi

Context: September 12th, 2024 marks the 127th anniversary of the **Battle of Saragarhi** (1897).

Historical Significance of Saragarhi

Saragarhi was a **communication post** between **Fort Lockhart** and **Fort Gulistan**, located in the rugged terrain of the **North West Frontier Province** (now in Pakistan). Both forts, originally built by **Maharaja Ranjit Singh**, were strategically important for the British military.

The Battle Unfolds

The tribal army aimed to **isolate Fort Lockhart and Fort Gulistan** by severing the communication lines between them. Despite being heavily outnumbered and with limited ammunition, the Sikh soldiers, led by **Havildar Ishar Singh**, chose to stand their ground rather than surrender.



Naik Lal Singh, though severely wounded, continued firing from his bed, and **Daad**, the non-combatant, killed five enemies before being overpowered. Gurmukh Singh sent a final message: "Permission to join the battle, Sir." After receiving approval, he fought to the death, marking the end of the battle.

The battle **delayed the tribal advance**, allowing British forces to regroup.

***Havildar Ishar Singh** was born in a village near Jagraon and joined the **Punjab Frontier Force** in his teens. He later became part of the **36th Sikh regiment** and, by his early 40s, was entrusted with the independent command of Saragarhi. He was a brilliant battlefield commander.*

***Daad**, the 22nd man at Saragarhi, was a Pashtun sweeper who fought bravely alongside the Sikh soldiers but **received no official recognition**. Today, his courage is remembered as part of the Saragarhi legacy.*

Queen Victoria awarded the **Indian Order of Merit** (equivalent to the Victoria Cross) posthumously to the 21 Sikh soldiers. Each soldier's family received two 'marabas' (50 acres) of land and 500 rupees.

100 years of Self-Respect Movement (SRM)

Context: 2024 marks the start of the **hundredth year** of the **Self-Respect Movement**.

The SRM founded in **1925** by E. V. Ramasamy (Periyar), was a continuation of the attempt to secularise and modernise the **Tamizh society** that began with the Dravidian Movement.

The movement being called '**Suyamariyathai**' or *Self-Respect* symbolises that '**Maanam**' or **honour is a basic human instinct** distinguishing humans from other animals.

Periyar identified the **notion of self-respect** with **three other important concepts**:

'**Samathuvam**' (Equality)

'**Suthanthiram**' (Freedom)

'**Samadharmam**' (Communism)

The movement challenged the ideological hegemony of the Indian Independence struggle by demanding that equality between sexes and eradicating caste be put on an equal footing with national liberation.

*September has been celebrated as '**Dravidian Month**' to commemorate the Dravidian Movement.*

Contribution

The Movement introduced and popularised **self-respect marriages**, which **removed the necessity for Brahmin priests** and religious rituals that were **not** conducted in **Sanskrit**.

Self-respect marriages were enacted into law in **1967**.

The movement advocated for **women's liberation** from oppressive social norms by championing causes such as **widow remarriage**, the **right to divorce**, the **right to property**, and even **abortion**. It granted women autonomy, equality and dignity, symbolising a break from tradition.

It criticised ancient texts that degraded women and actively **promoted contraception** as a means of empowering women to control their bodies.

It was pivotal in its promotion of **inter-caste marriages**, which was seen as a push-back to the patriarchal forces controlling the choice of partner and marriage.



Critique

The Movement **prioritised social reform over political independence**. Though it was not opposed to independence, it warned of a replacement of British rulers with elite Hindu caste groups.

Ambedkar and Gandhi on Caste electorate

Context: Gandhi & Ambedkar's ideological clash over separate electorates for SC highlights their **conflicting visions** for **caste reform** and **political representation** in pre-independence India.

Gandhi's perspective

Initial Orthodoxy: Early in his life, Gandhi adhered to **traditional Hindu views** on caste, **supporting** practices like **social segregation** and promoting the **idea of caste duties**. He was **against** concepts like **interdining** and **intecaste marriage**.

Rejection of Untouchability: Over time, he **evolved to reject untouchability**, advocating for the dignity and rights of untouchables, whom he began to refer to as "**Harijans**" (children of God).

Integrating Caste for National Strength

Hindu Unity: Gandhi believed a united Hindu community was vital for India's independence, seeing divisions as harmful.

Opposition to Separate Electorates: He argued that separate electorates for Scheduled Castes would fragment Hindu society and weaken anti-colonial efforts. He feared this would facilitate **British "divide and rule,"** undermining the independence movement.

Emphasis on Integration: Gandhi advocated for **integrating lower castes** into **mainstream** Hindu society and promoted the **abolition of untouchability**.

Moral Leadership: He positioned himself as a **moral leader**, using **self-sacrifice** and **non-violence** to inspire unity across castes.

Universal Rights: He stressed that the rights of lower castes should align with the broader goal of national unity and progress.

Hunger Strike in Yerawada Jail: In **September 1932**, Gandhi undertook a hunger strike to protest the proposal for separate electorates.

Ambedkar's Perspective

Political Representation: Ambedkar argued that separate electorates were essential for meaningful political representation, allowing Scheduled Castes to elect their leaders.

Addressing Historical Marginalization: He saw separate electorates as necessary to rectify historical injustices and empower marginalised communities.

Protection Against Majority Tyranny: Ambedkar asserted that separate electorates would safeguard Scheduled Castes' interests against the **"tyranny of the majority."**

Affirmative Action: He viewed them as **affirmative action** to help lower castes gain political power and influence.

Foundation for Social Change: Ambedkar believed political empowerment would catalyse broader social change, aiding the fight against caste discrimination and promoting equality.

Poona Pact

Background and Negotiation: **Poona Pact** emerged from the conflict between Gandhi and Ambedkar over separate electorates following **Gandhi's hunger strike 1932**.



Elimination of Separate Electorates: It replaced the demand for separate electorates with reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in legislative bodies, facilitating participation in joint electorates.

Reservation of Seats: The pact ensured a specific number of reserved seats for Scheduled Castes in provincial legislatures, enhancing their political representation.

Gandhi's Influence: Gandhi's fast and moral authority pressured Ambedkar to compromise.

Ambedkar's Reluctance: Although Ambedkar agreed to the pact, he saw it as a concession that did not fully address caste oppression and was sceptical of its effectiveness.

Long-term Impact: The Poona Pact laid the groundwork for India's reservation system, influencing policies to uplift Scheduled Castes and sparking ongoing debates about representation and equality.

Yakshagana

Context: UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage accredits Keremane Idagunji Mahaganapati Yakshagana Mandali. It was founded in 1934 by Late Keremane Shivarama Hegde.

Objective: To educate future generations, safeguard Yakshagana from decline, and promote the traditional Yakshagana Bayalata to ensure its continued relevance and vitality,

Yakshagana

Yakshagana is a traditional theatre that emerged between the 11th and 16th centuries in coastal Karnataka and some parts of Kerala.

It is a unique combination of dance, music, dialogues, colorful costumes, and heavy facial make-up.

It was inspired by the Vaishnava Bhakti movement that started in the 11th century. It took the format of dance drama under the Vijayanagara Empire.

Theme: Stories of Lord Krishna and Vishnu, Hindu tales of Ramayana and Mahabharata.

Accompanied by percussion instruments like chenda, maddalam, jagatta or chengila (cymbals) and chakratala or elathalam (small cymbals).

Men have traditionally played all parts, including female characters, while women are now included in Yakshagana troupes.

Abhidhamma Divas

Context: International Abhidhamma Divas was celebrated by Ministry of Culture in association with the International Buddhist Confederation (IBC).

It commemorates the descent of Lord Buddha from the celestial realm of the thirty-three divine beings (Tāvatiṃsa-devaloka) to Sankassiya, known today as Sankisa Basantapur in Uttar Pradesh.

The place is documented by the Aśokan Elephant Pillar, signifying the importance of the place of event.

It coincides with the end of the first Rainy Retreat (Vassa) and the Pavāraṇā festival, a time when monks and nuns conclude their retreat period with a ceremony.

Teachings of Abhidhamma

The Abhidhamma Piṭaka is the third part of the Pāli Canon. It contains the profound moral psychology and philosophy of the Buddha's teaching, in contrast to the simpler discourses in the Sutta Piṭaka and the rules and regulations in the Vinaya Piṭaka.



Comprised of **seven books**, the Abhidhamma teachings offer a detailed framework for understanding the nature of existence. They address the processes of birth, death, and mental phenomena in a precise and abstract manner.

Traditionally, it is believed that Buddha first taught the Abhidhamma to the gods in the **Tavatimsa heaven** and later conveyed these teachings to his disciple **Sariputta**, who expanded upon them in the six core books of the Abhidhamma Piñaka.

*The Pali Canon contains the **Vinaya Pitaka** (rules for monastics) and the **Sutta Pitaka** (discourses of the Buddha and his principal disciples).*

Brahmi inscription found in Dharanikota

Context: An inscription was found while ploughing in **Dharanikota** village at Amaravathi in **Andhra Pradesh**. It is written in the **Prakrit language** and **Brahmi** characters of the 2nd century C.E.

About Dharnikota

In 500 BCE, **Dharanikota** was known as **Dhanyakatakam**, the **capital** of the **Satavahana dynasty**, which ruled in the Deccan from the 1st to 3rd centuries CE.

Xuanzang visited the **great Amaravati stupa** at **Dharanikota** and wrote an enthusiastic account of the place and the viharas. **Jainism** flourished here during the reign of **Sada kings**.

Dalai Lama conducted a very large **Kalachakra ceremony** there in January 2006.

About Brahmi Script

It is the earliest writing system developed in India **after the Indus script**. All modern **Indian** and several hundred **Southeast and East Asian scripts** are believed to be **derived from Brahmi**. Some descendant scripts of Brahmi are Bengali, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Tibetan, etc.

The earliest (indisputably dated) and best-known Brahmi inscriptions are the **rock-cut edicts of Ashoka** in north-central India, dating to **250–232 BCE**.

In most cases, Brahmi and its derivatives are written from **left to right**, but an early coin discovered in **Madhya Pradesh** is inscribed with Brahmi characters running from **right to left**.

It is used in ancient texts of the three major Dharmic religions, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, as well as their Chinese translations. **For example**, the **Lalitavistara Sūtra** (Mahayana Buddhist Sutra).

Brahmi was deciphered by **James Prinsep**, the secretary of the **Asiatic Society of Bengal**.

Silk Road

Context: Archaeologists unearthed two **medieval** cities, **Tugunbulak** and **Tashbulak**, in **Uzbekistan**, challenging the traditional understanding of the **Silk Road**.

In 2013, China introduced the "Belt and Road Initiative" to revive these routes, aiming to enhance connectivity with over 60 countries across Asia, Europe, and East Africa.

Silk Road (Silk route)

It was an ancient web of trade routes stretching from **China** (East) to the **Mediterranean Sea** (West).

Zhang Qian is credited as the **"Father of the Silk Road"** for his pioneering expedition.

It facilitated trade in goods, including silk, spices, gold and gemstones, across various civilisations.

Trade Routes of Silk Road



Northern Route: Popularised under **Emperor Wu of Han** (141–87 BC), this route benefited from **imperial protection** against nomadic threats, facilitating safe passage for merchants across Central Asia.

Southern Route (Karakoram route): Passed through the **Karakoram mountains**. Stretched into Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, **India**, and China.

Southwestern Route: Traversed the **Ganges Delta** between China and **India**. Served as various global items, including Roman beads and gemstones from Thailand and Java.

Buddhism spread from India to China and Central Asia along the northern branch of the Silk Road.

Decline of Original Silk Road

Rise of Sea Trade: European powers' development of faster maritime routes during the **Age of Exploration** reduced the need for long, hazardous overland journeys.

Political Instability: The **collapse of the Mongol Empire**, which had secured and maintained many sections of the Silk Road, led to increased danger and instability, discouraging trade.

Spread of Diseases: The Black Death (plague) and other epidemics travelled along the Silk Road, decreasing trade and movement across borders.

Silk Road and India

The **four corridors** link India to the Ancient Silk Roads:

Tibetan Plateau to **Sravasti** (Uttar Pradesh)

Western Nepal to **Ganges Valley** (Northern India)

Karakoram Route through Western Himalayas

Ganges Route from Delhi to **Chandraketugarh** (West Bengal)



Silk Road Sites in India

There are 12 such places in India. These are spread across seven states in India: Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Puducherry, Punjab, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh.

These sites are on the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Ramappa Temple & Ghanpur (Kota Gullu) Temple

Context: The Centre approves development loans for **Ramappa Circuit** and **Somasila Retreat** in **Telangana** under Special Assistance to States/Union Territories for Capital Investment (SASCI) scheme.

The Ramappa Circuit includes various components like **Ramappa Temple**, **Kota Gullu Temple**, and the lakefront development of Ghanpur village.

The Somasila retreat will include facilities for wellness and spiritual practices, an organic café, and an interpretation centre to educate visitors about the local culture and environment

Ramappa Temple (Rudreswara Temple)

It is located in Palampet, **Telangana**, and has been recognised as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Historical Significance: It was constructed by **Kakatiya General Recharla Rudra Reddy** during the reign of Kakatiya ruler **Ganapati Deva** in the 13th century. It is a Sivalayam dedicated to **Lord Ramalingeswara**.

Marco Polo's Praise: Renowned traveller Marco Polo visited the Kakatiya Empire and described the temple as "**the brightest star in the galaxy of temples**".

Sandbox technique of construction: Its foundation is built with **red sandstone**. The flooring is made of granite & pillars are of basalt. Meanwhile, the white gopuram (tower) is made of **floating light bricks**.



Architectural Beauty: The temple stands on a **6 feet high star-shaped platform** with walls, pillars and ceilings adorned with intricate carvings.

Ghanpur Temples (Kota Gullu)

Location: Ghanpur, **Telangana**.

Period: Constructed during the reign of **Ganapati Deva** in the **late 12th and early 13th centuries**.

Design and Structure: It comprises over 20 temples within a fortified complex. The main temple is dedicated to **Lord Shiva**. These temples are enclosed by **two layers of brick walls**.

Sculptural Art: The temples feature mythical sculptures such as **Gaja-Kesari** (a half-human, half-lion figure riding an elephant) and **horse-headed, lion-backed elephants**. Intricate carvings and floral patterns adorn the pillars and walls, showcasing the detailed artistry of the Kakatiya dynasty.



About Kakatiya Dynasty

Attribute	Details
Capital	Orugallu (Warangal)
Common Languages	Telugu, Sanskrit, Kannada
Religion	Hinduism
Government	Monarchy
Preceded By	Eastern Chalukyas
Succeeded By	Western Chalukya Empire, Reddi Kingdom, Musunuri Nayakas, Delhi Sultanate, Bahmani Sultanate, Vijayanagara Empire

Characteristics of Kakatiya Architecture

Elaborate Pillars and Sculptures: Intricately carved pillars and sculptures often depicting deities, mythical creatures, and scenes from Hindu epics.

Star-Shaped Platforms: Many temples were built on raised **star-shaped platforms**.

Use of Granite and Sandstone: Robust materials like granite and sandstone were extensively used, ensuring the longevity and resilience of their structures.



List of Temples built by Kakatiyas

Temple Name	Dedicated To	Significance
Thousand Pillar Temple	Lord Shiva, Vishnu, Surya	It is known for its architectural grandeur and star-shaped structure.
Padmakshi Temple	Goddess Padmakshi	Famous for its Jain influence and Kakatiya-era carvings.
Inavolu Mallikarjuna Swamy Temple	Lord Shiva	One of the early Kakatiya temples is known for its cultural importance.

The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904

Context: Tensions in Sambhal highlight Place of Worship Act, 1991 interpretation issues. Sambhal's Shahi Jama Masjid is a "protected monument" under **Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904**.

About The Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904

It was enacted during the tenure of **Lord Curzon** in British India.

Objective: The Act aimed to ensure the conservation of monuments, sculptures, carvings, and other structures of historical, archaeological, or artistic interest.

Protected Monuments: The Act empowered the government to declare certain monuments "**protected**" and regulate activities around them to prevent unauthorised digging or removal of artefacts.

Maintenance and Preservation: It provides for the maintenance and repair of protected monuments by the government or authorised agencies.

Acquisition: The govt. could acquire private land containing monuments if necessary for preservation.

Penalties: Any injury to protected monuments was considered an offence punishable by law.



Haveli Sangeet

Context: Haveli Sangeet was recently in news.

It is a form of **Hindustani classical music** sung in havelis. The essential component is **dhrupad**.

Origin: **Govardhan, Mathura** in Braj, northern India. It is also linked to the **Pushti Margiya temples** of the Vaishnava Tradition, where people sang daily to Krishna.

Historical Background: Revived during the Bhakti movement; declined during the medieval period due to socio-political changes.

Musical Styles: This includes Prabandh, Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khyal, Kirtana, and Bhajan, but is not limited to the Dhrupad style alone.

Languages Used: Songs are performed in **Brij Bhasha, Sanskrit, Punjabi, and Marwari**.

Significant Figures: Vallabhacharya, Shri Vitthalnathji (Shri Gusaiji), Surdas, Pandit Jasraj.

Vallabhacharya and the Rise of Haveli Sangeet

Discovery of Lord Shrinath: In 1556, **Vallabhacharya** discovered a divine form of **Bhagwat**, named **Lord Shrinath** (the 'Consort of the Goddess of Wealth'), in a cave on **Giriraj Mountain**.

Fearing destruction during Aurangzeb's reign, Vallabhacharya moved the deity multiple times before establishing a permanent home in **Nathdwara, Rajasthan**.

Establishment of Haveli Sangeet: The temple of Shrinathji in Nathdwara, known as Haveli of Shrinathji, serves as seat of the Pushtimarg. The music associated with these temples, called Haveli Sangeet.

Devotional Services and Disciples: Vallabhacharya appointed four disciples—Kumbhandas, Surdas, Parmanandas & Krishnadas—for devotional services, with Kumbhandas as Shrinath's first kirtankar (singer).

Expansion by Shri Vitthalnath: Vallabhacharya's son, Shri Vitthalnath (Shri Gusai), further systematised the sewa (service) and added four more disciples—Govindawami, Chhitaswami, Chaturbhujdas, and Nanddas—forming the Ashta Sakhas (eight companions) of the Lord.

Introduction of Raga, Bhog, and Shringar: Shri Gusai introduced raga (melody), bhog (offering), and shringar (adornment) as essential parts of sewa.

Raag sewa involves singing padas (devotional hymns) in various ragas & taals (rhythmic cycles) according to the eight prahars (time periods), including Mangala, Shringar, Gwaal, Rajbhoga, Uthapan, Bhoga, Sandhya, Aarati, and Shayan.

Guru Nanak Dev

Context: **Guru Nanak Jayanti** in 2024, celebrated on November 15, coincided with **Kartik Purnima**. Also known as **Gurpurab**, it marks the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the **founder of Sikhism**.

Guru Nanak Dev Ji (c. 1469–1539 CE)

Birth: Born in **1469** in **Talwandi** (now Nankana Sahib, Pakistan).

Enlightenment: Guru Nanak got his enlightenment in **Sultanpur** in **1496**.

Founder of Sikhism: Established the Sikh faith, rejecting caste discrimination and advocating for devotion to one formless, all-powerful, and truthful God.

Rejection of Rituals: Denounced idol worship, pilgrimages, and caste distinctions, promoting a practical, ethical, and truthful way of life.

Core Teachings: God conceptualised as **Nirguna** (attribute less) and **Nirankar** (formless).



Three Pillars of Sikhism

Nam Japna: Contemplating and chanting the name of one God.

Kirat Karna: Earning an honest livelihood through righteous work.

Vand Chhakna: Sharing one's wealth with others to promote social equality.

Death: Guru Nanak passed away in **1539** at **Kartarpur, Punjab**.

Key Aspects of Guru Nanak Dev Ji's Life & Teachings

Egalitarian Society: Promoted equality through **Langar** (shared community meal), **Pangat** (eating together without discrimination), and **Sangat** (collective decision-making).

Oneness of God: Emphasized the message of "**Ek Onkar Satnam**," advocating that **all are equal**.

Core Values: His teachings centered on **forgiveness, patience, kindness, and compassion**, essential for fostering societal harmony.

Just Society: He advocated "**kirat karo**" (honest work), "**naam japo**" (devotion), and "**vand chhako**" (sharing with others) to create a balanced and responsible community.

Karma and Dharma: Emphasized that **karma** (actions) should be the basis of **dharma** (righteousness), linking spirituality with social responsibility.

Charity and Service: Promoted the concept of "**dasvandh**," encouraging individuals to donate a tenth of their earnings to help the needy.

Gender Equality: Taught that **both men and women are equally** valued and share God's grace, advocating for gender justice.

Respect for Women: Stressed that women deserve equal respect and opportunities, a significant teaching in the context of modern **gender equality**.

Promoting Peace: Guru Nanak Dev Ji's philosophy of oneness, compassion, and service offers a pathway to **peace and social cohesion**.

Spiritual Leadership: As a spiritual guide, he emphasized the **role of a Guru** in providing illumination, dispelling doubts, and guiding towards truth.

Sikhism

Founding and Core Beliefs: Sikhism was founded by **Guru Nanak** in the 15th century.

God & Soul: Sikhism believes in **one God**, aiming to reconnect with God by overcoming ego and desires.

Equality and Social Justice: Guru Nanak **promoted social equality** and opposed the caste system, advocating for equal treatment for all individuals.

Guru Granth Sahib: The Guru Granth Sahib is the **eternal Guru** after the ten Gurus, containing hymns that promote universal values.

The Khalsa and Five Ks: Guru Gobind Singh established the **Khalsa** in **1699**, with Sikhs wearing the **Five Ks** as symbols of their faith.

Gurdwaras and Takhts: Sikhs worship in Gurdwaras, with **Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar** being the most significant. **Five Takhts** are key institutions in Sikhism.

Service (Seva): Seva (selfless service) is a core principle of Sikhism, encouraging individuals to serve humanity without expecting rewards.

Sikh Population in India: As per the census 2011, the Sikh population in India is around **20 million** (1.7% of the total population).



Guru Tegh Bahadur

Context: On Sikh **Guru Tegh Bahadur's martyrdom day**, President Murmu paid tributes.

Guru Tegh Bahadur was the **ninth Sikh Guru**. He was born in **Amritsar** in 1621 and became leader of Sikhs from 1665 until his death in **1675**.

Guru Tegh Bahadur is revered as the '**Protector of Humanity**' (*Srisht-di-Chadar*).

He wrote extensively, and many of his hymns are part of **Guru Granth Sahib**.

He built the city of **Anandpur Sahib** (in Rupnagar/Ropar district, on the edge of Shivalik Hills, near the **Sutlej River**, in Punjab).

Gurudwara **Sis Ganj Sahib** and Gurdwara **Rakab Ganj Sahib** in Delhi mark the places of Guru Tegh Bahadur's execution and cremation.

He stood up for the **Kashmiri Pandits**, who sought his help against Aurangzeb's religious oppression.

He was publicly beheaded on the orders of **Aurangzeb** as he resisted the forced conversion to Islam.

As per **Nanakshahi calendar** released by **Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee**, his martyrdom is remembered as **Shaheedi Divas** every year on **24 November**.

Inspired by Guru Tegh Bahadur, **his son**, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, went on to formalise the Sikh community into the distinguished and symbolic society known as the **Khalsa**.

Akal Takht

Context: The **Akal Takht**, the **supreme temporal seat** of the **Sikhs**, imposed **religious punishment** on the former deputy CM of Punjab and President of the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) for the alleged misrule of the SAD government from 2007 to 2017.

Establishment of the Akal Takht

Foundation: It was established by the **sixth Sikh master**, **Guru Hargobind**, in 1606 following the execution of his father, Guru Arjan Dev, by the Mughals.

Purpose: Guru Hargobind used this platform for **governance** and issued the **first directive (Hukamnama)** from here, urging Sikh congregations to contribute horses and weapons to the Panth.

Symbolism: The Guru requested two swords, one shorter symbolising **miri (temporal power)** and one longer symbolising **piri (spirituality)**, indicating the primacy of spiritual authority over temporal power.

Defiance: The Akal Takht symbolised Sikh defiance of Mughal authority, with its **12-foot-high platform** challenging **Emperor Jahangir's 11-foot-high throne**.

Focal Point: After the execution of **Banda Singh Bahadur** in **1716**, the Akal Takht became the **focal point for Sikhs** during periods of persecution. Sikhs gathered here on Baisakhi and Diwali for **Sarbat Khalsa assemblies** to make important decisions.

Historical Assemblies: **Maharaja Ranjit Singh** convened one of the last assemblies in 1805 to deliberate on supporting the **Maratha prince of Indore, Jaswant Rao Holkar**, against the British.

Appointment of the Jathedar

Authority: The **Jathedar** of the Akal Takht is the supreme temporal and religious authority of the Sikhs.

Criteria: The Jathedar must be baptised, possess a deep knowledge of Sikh history and scriptures, and be free from moral shortcomings.



Initial Phase: Initially, the **Sarbat Khalsa** appointed the Akal Takht Jathedar during annual congregations. After British control, the Darbar Sahib committee controlled the appointments.

SGPC Role: Following the **Sikh Gurdwaras Act of 1925**, the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) began appointing the Jathedar.

Religious Punishment by the Akal Takht

Tankhah: The term "**tankhah**" refers to a **penalty** imposed on a **Sikh** who has violated the **Rehat Maryada**, which is the **Sikh code of conduct**. It involves performing **extra prayers (Bani)**, performing **Seva (selfless service)**, making public apologies, or undertaking pilgrimages.

Justice: Any Sikh can be summoned to the Akal Takht, tried, and sentenced. It applies only to those who voluntarily submit to its authority, aiming to remove ego and instil humility.

Ajmer Sharif Dargah

Context: A court petition in Ajmer calls for a survey of the **Ajmer Sharif Dargah**, suggesting it was built on the remains of demolished Hindu and Jain temples.

Historical Background of Ajmer

Origin of Ajmer: Historically known as **Ajaymeru**, it is named after its founder, **Raja Ajay Pal Chauhan**.

Ajmer served as the **capital of the Chauhans**, a prominent Rajput clan that ruled regions of present-day Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh from the 7th to the 12th centuries CE.

Destruction by Muhammad of Ghor: In **1192**, after **defeating Prithviraj Chauhan** in the **Second Battle of Tarain**, Muhammad of Ghor's forces sacked Ajmer, destroying many temples.

*The petition references **Har Bilas Sarda's** book "**Ajmer: Historical and Descriptive**" (1911), which notes the destruction of temples but **does not** directly link it to the construction of the dargah.*

Origin and subsequent development of Ajmer Sharif

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti was interred in **1236** in the cell where he lived. **No mausoleum** was **initially** constructed, and his memory faded in Ajmer for over two centuries.

Sultan Mahmud Khan Khalji of **Malwa** (not to be confused with the **Khalji sultans of Delhi**) and his son **Ghiyasuddin** built the **first pucca mausoleum**. They also constructed the grand **Buland Darwaza**.

The current **white marble dome** was built in **1532**, during **Humayun's reign**. In **1616**, **Jahangir** added a **gold railing** around the saint's tomb. **Shah Jahan** carried out additional expansions.

It is an example of **Indo-Islamic architecture**, and the dome features a **lotus** and a **crown of gold**, donated by Rampur's **Nawab Haider Ali Khan**.

The dargah has a royal darbar, **Mehfil Khana**, constructed in 1888. In the 19th century, the **Nizam of Hyderabad** donated the **Nizam Gate**.

The six-day **Urs festival** marks the death anniversary of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti.

Budaun's Jama Masjid Shamsi

Context: A court in **Budaun, Uttar Pradesh**, is hearing a plea seeking permission for Hindus to pray at the **800-year-old Jama Masjid Shamsi**.



The petitioners argue that mosque was constructed after demolishing the **Neelkanth Mahadev Temple**.

The Muslim side refutes this claim, citing the **Places of Worship Act, 1991**.

Historical Significance of the Jama Masjid Shamsi

Construction History

Commissioned by Sultan Shams ud-Din **Illutmish** in **1223 AD**, according to inscriptions on the mosque.

The mosque's construction occurred during the governorship of Illutmish's son, **Rukn-ud-Din Firoz**.

It was repaired in the 16th century after a fire, with **domes added** under **Akbar's reign**.

The mosque is recognised as a **Monument of National Importance** and a **National Heritage Site**.

Architectural Features

It is one of the oldest and largest **congregational mosques** in North India.

The mosque showcases **Persian** and **Afghan architectural** influences.

The mosque is constructed using **red sandstone** and **white marble**.

Historical Evidence and Claims

Some historical records, including those by British-era Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) officials, mention that the mosque was constructed using materials from demolished Hindu temples. It also mentioned **dwarf pillars** with **Hindu architectural** features near the mosque's mihrab.

Alexander Cunningham, founder of the **ASI**, noted local traditions that suggest a temple, Harmandar, stood at the site before the mosque.

Gazetteer References: The 1907 district gazetteer credits the construction of the Neelkanth Mahadev Temple to the 12th-century **Chauhan king Ajaypal**.

Subramania Bharati

Context : PM released works of **Subramania Bharati** on his birth anniversary.

He was also known as **Mahakavi Bharathiyar**. He was a Tamil poet, freedom fighter, and social reformer.

He knew **32 languages**, including three foreign languages. He considered **Tamil** and all other **Indian languages** to be in **no way inferior to English**.

His writings on **nationalism** and **independence** played an important role in inspiring the masses in Tamil Nadu to support the Indian freedom struggle. Bharati's compositions are mostly **short lyrical** outpourings on patriotic, devotional, and mystic themes, earning him the title of a lyrical poet.

His best-known works include "**Kanṇan Pattu**" (Songs to Krishna), "**Panchali Sapatham**" (Panchali's Vow), and "**Kuyil Pattu**" (Kuyil's Song).

He translated Vedic hymns, **Patanjali's Yoga Sutra**, and the **Bhagavad Gita** into Tamil.

He started his career as the **Assistant Editor** of the Tamil daily **Swadesamitran** in 1904 and later edited the Tamil weekly "**India**" and the English newspaper "**Bala Bharatham**" with **M.P.T. Acharya**.

He assisted **Sri Aurobindo** in the "**Arya**" journal and later "**Karma Yogi**" in Pondicherry. His translation and adaptation of "**Vande Mataram**" became a potent rallying cry for the nation's freedom fighters.





Bharati wrote "**Panchali Sabatham**," an epic poem based on the **Mahabharata**, criticising social injustices and advocating for reform.

He faced persecution for his views from the British authorities and orthodox elements within his own community, which led to his **exile** in **1908**.

TATHASTU ICS