

CUET · HISTORY · CLASS XII · CODE 314

# Thinkers, Beliefs and Buildings (Cultural Developments)

CUET unit: Theme IV — History of Buddhism and Jainism

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## Snapshot

- The period c. 600 BCE – 600 CE saw new philosophies emerge (Upanishads, Jainism, Buddhism, Ajivikas, Lokayatas) against the Vedic-sacrificial backdrop.
- The stupa at Sanchi is central — its discovery story (Bhopal Begums, John Marshall, Cunningham), structural vocabulary (anda, harmika, yashti, chhatri, vedika, toranas) and sculptural programme.
- The Buddha's life ran Lumbini–Bodh Gaya–Sarnath–Kusinagara; key terms are the Tipitaka, the sangha of bhikkhus/bhikkhunis, and the later split into Theravada–Mahayana.
- Mahavira's Jainism (ratnatraya, ahimsa, five vows, tirthankaras) and the parallel rise of Puranic Hinduism (Vaishnavism, Shaivism, early temples) complete the picture.
- Highly visual: tests sculpture-symbol identification (empty seat, Bodhi tree, wheel, footprints, shalabhanjika, Gajalakshmi).

## Detailed Notes

### 2.1 Core concepts

- The mid-first millennium BCE was a turning point in world history — Zarathustra (Iran), Kong Zi (China), Socrates/Plato/Aristotle (Greece), and Mahavira and Gautama Buddha (India) — all trying to understand existence and the cosmic order in a context of new kingdoms in the Ganga valley (NCERT §2, p. 84).
- The Rigveda (c. 1500–1000 BCE) contains hymns to Agni, Indra, Soma; sacrifices first collective, later domestic, and elaborate rajasuya/ashvamedha were performed by chiefs and kings depending on Brahmana priests (NCERT §2.1, p. 84).
- The Upanishads (c. sixth century BCE onwards) raised new questions about life after death, rebirth, karma and the nature of ultimate reality; the Chhandogya Upanishad describes the self as both smaller than a mustard seed and greater than the worlds (NCERT §2.2 & Source 2, pp. 84–85).
- Buddhist texts mention as many as 64 sects; debates took place in the kutagarashala ("hut with a pointed roof") or in groves (NCERT §2.3, p. 85).
- Mahavira and the Buddha both questioned the authority of the Vedas and emphasised individual agency for liberation, against the Brahmanical position that birth-determined caste/gender fixed destiny (NCERT §2.3, p. 85).

- The Ajivikas (e.g. Makkhali Gosala) were fatalists holding that pleasure/pain in samsara cannot be altered; the Lokayatas (e.g. Ajita Kesakambalin) were materialists denying alms, sacrifice, the next world, and survival after death (NCERT Source 3, p. 87).
- Jaina tradition: Mahavira (Vardhamana, sixth century BCE) was preceded by 23 tirthankaras (literally "those who guide men and women across the river of existence"); the entire world is animated — even stones, rocks and water have life (NCERT §3, p. 88).
- Five Jaina vows: abstain from killing, stealing, lying; observe celibacy; abstain from possessing property — ahimsa is central, and asceticism/penance frees one from the cycle of karma (NCERT §3, p. 88).
- Jaina literature in Prakrit, Sanskrit and Tamil; manuscripts preserved in temple libraries; earliest stone sculptures of tirthankaras recovered from many sites (NCERT §3.1, p. 89).
- Buddha (Siddhartha, son of a Sakya chief) — sheltered upbringing, encountered an old man, sick man, corpse and a homeless mendicant; left palace, tried bodily mortification, abandoned extremes, meditated, attained enlightenment (NCERT §4, pp. 89–90).
- Buddhist philosophy: the world is transient (anicca), soulless (anatta), full of sorrow (dukkha); the path of moderation between penance and self-indulgence overcomes suffering; whether god exists was irrelevant in earliest Buddhism (NCERT §5, p. 91).
- The Buddha's last words: "Be lamps unto yourselves as all of you must work out your own liberation"; goal is nibbana — "the extinguishing of the ego and desire" (NCERT §5, pp. 91–92).
- Sangha — bhikkhus lived on alms with a single bowl; women admitted through Ananda's mediation; foster mother Mahapajapati Gotami was the first bhikkhuni; respected women who attained liberation were called theris (NCERT §6, p. 92).
- The Tipitaka ("three baskets") was compiled at the council of senior monks at Vesali (Pali for Vaishali) after the Buddha's death: Vinaya Pitaka (rules for sangha), Sutta Pitaka (Buddha's teachings), Abhidhamma Pitaka (philosophical matters) (NCERT box, p. 86).
- Pilgrims Fa Xian and Xuan Zang travelled from China to India in search of texts; oldest Buddhist texts in Pali, later compositions in Sanskrit; regional histories like Dipavamsa and Mahavamsa written in Sri Lanka (NCERT box, p. 86).
- Four sacred Buddhist sites: Lumbini (birth), Bodh Gaya (enlightenment), Sarnath (first sermon), Kusinagara (nibbana); about 200 years later Asoka erected a pillar at Lumbini (NCERT §7, p. 96).
- The word stupa is Sanskrit for "a heap"; originated as a semicircular mound (anda); above it the harmika (balcony — abode of the gods), the yashti (mast) and the chhatra (umbrella); around the mound a railing (vedika) separating sacred from secular space (NCERT §7.3, pp. 96–97).

- According to the Ashokavadana, Asoka distributed the Buddha's relics to every important town and ordered stupas over them; by the 2nd century BCE stupas at Bharhut, Sanchi and Sarnath were built (NCERT §7.1, p. 96).
- Donors at Sanchi included Satavahana kings, guilds (e.g. ivory workers financed part of a gateway), and hundreds of ordinary women, men, bhikkhus and bhikkhunis named in votive inscriptions (NCERT §7.2, p. 96).
- Sanchi survived because Shahjehan Begum and Sultan Jehan Begum funded preservation; John Marshall dedicated his Sanchi volumes to Sultan Jehan; French and English settled for plaster-cast copies; Amaravati, "discovered" earlier in 1796, was looted and is now an "insignificant little mound" (NCERT §1 and §8, pp. 82–83, 98–99).
- Cunningham's **Bhilsa Topes** (1854) was one of the earliest works on Sanchi; H.H. Cole pleaded for in situ preservation — successful at Sanchi but not at Amaravati (NCERT §8 and Timeline 2, pp. 98–99, 110).
- Early sculptors did not show the Buddha in human form — they used symbols: the empty seat (meditation), the stupa (mahaparinibbana), the wheel (first sermon at Sarnath), the Bodhi tree (enlightenment) (NCERT §9.2, p. 100).
- Popular motifs at Sanchi included the shalabhanjika (woman whose touch makes trees flower/fruit), Gajalakshmi (woman flanked by elephants performing abhisheka — identified by some as Maya, by others as the goddess of good fortune), serpents, elephants; James Fergusson called Sanchi a centre of "tree and serpent worship" because he had no access to Buddhist texts (NCERT §9.3, pp. 101–103).
- Mahayana ("great vehicle") emerged by the first century CE — introduced the Bodhisatta (compassionate being who accumulates merit to help others) and image worship of Buddha and Bodhisattas; the older school called itself Theravada (followers of the theras), not Hinayana (NCERT §10.1, p. 103).
- Puranic Hinduism — Vaishnavism (ten avatars of Vishnu), Shaivism (Shiva as linga), and goddess cults developed bhakti; the Puranas, compiled by Brahmanas by mid-first millennium CE, were in simple Sanskrit verse read aloud to all including women and Shudras (NCERT §10.2, pp. 104–105).
- Earliest temples: small square garbhagriha with one doorway; tall shikhara above; some hollowed out of rock; the Barabar caves (Bihar) were built in the third century BCE by Asoka for Ajivika renouncers; tradition culminated in the eighth-century Kailashnatha temple at Ellora carved from a single rock (NCERT §10.3, pp. 105–107).
- Indo-Greek influence visible in Buddha and Bodhisatta images from Taxila and Peshawar; nineteenth-century European scholars judged these "best" because they were closest to Greek models — using familiar yardsticks to make sense of the unfamiliar (NCERT §11.1, p. 108).
- Major timeline checkpoints: c. sixth century BCE — Early Upanishads, Jainism, Buddhism; c. third century BCE — first stupas; c. second century BCE onwards —

Mahayana, Vaishnavism, Shaivism, goddess cults; c. third century CE — earliest temples (NCERT Timeline 1, p. 110).

## 2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Kutagarashala	Literally a "hut with a pointed roof" — venue for philosophical debates	85
Tirthankara	"Those who guide men and women across the river of existence"; Jainism had 24, Mahavira being the 24th preceded by 23 others	88
Ahimsa	Non-injury to living beings — central Jaina principle	88
Anicca	The Buddhist idea that the world is transient and constantly changing	91
Anatta	The Buddhist idea that the world is soulless — nothing permanent or eternal	91
Dukkha	Sorrow, intrinsic to human existence	91
Nibbana	The extinguishing of the ego and desire — end of the cycle of suffering	92
Bhikkhu	A monk who lived on alms (literally a beggar)	92
Bhikkhuni	A female monk; Mahapajapati Gotami was the first	92
Theri	A respected woman who had attained liberation	92
Tipitaka	"Three baskets" — Vinaya, Sutta and Abhidhamma Pitakas, compiled at Vesali	86
Vinaya Pitaka	Rules and regulations for those who joined the sangha	86
Sutta Pitaka	The Buddha's teachings	86
Abhidhamma Pitaka	Buddhist texts dealing with philosophical matters	86
Hagiography	Biography of a saint or religious leader, often celebratory and not literally accurate	89
Sangha	The monastic order founded by the Buddha	92
Chaitya	Sacred place / funerary mound (from chita, funeral pyre)	95
Stupa	Sanskrit "a heap"; mound containing relics of the Buddha	96
Anda	The semicircular mound of earth at the base of the stupa	96
Harmika	Balcony-like structure above the anda, representing the abode of the gods	96
Yashti	Mast rising from the harmika	97
Chhatri	Umbrella surmounting the yashti	97

Term	Definition	Page
Pradakshina patha	Path around the mound walked clockwise, keeping the mound on the right, imitating the sun's course	97
Torana	Richly carved gateway installed at the four cardinal points of the stupa	97
Mahayana	"Great vehicle" — emphasised Bodhisattas, image worship, idea of a saviour	103
Theravada	"Path of the old, respected teachers (theras)" — name used by older school for itself	103
Bodhisatta	Compassionate being who accumulated merit to help others rather than enter nibbana	103
Shalabhanjika	Woman whose touch caused trees to flower and bear fruit — auspicious motif at Sanchi	101
Gajalakshmi	"Goddess of good fortune", woman surrounded by lotuses and elephants performing abhisheka	102
Garbhagriha	Small square sanctum room in the early temple	105
Shikhara	Tall structure built over the central shrine	106
In situ	"On the spot" — leaving artefacts where they were found	99

### 2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Map of Major Buddhist sites (Map 1, p. 95):** Lumbini, Shravasti, Kusinagara, Sarnath, Bodh Gaya, Barabar, Bharhut, Sanchi, Ajanta, Nasik, Junnar, Karle, Nagarjunakonda, Amaravati.
- **Plan and elevation of the Great Stupa, Sanchi (Fig. 4.10a-b, p. 97):** plan shows the circular vedika with four toranas at the cardinal points and the pradakshina path; elevation shows the anda, harmika, yashti and chhatri stacked vertically.
- **Departure of the Buddha sculpture from Amaravati (Fig. 4.7, p. 90, c. 200 CE):** depicts the Buddha leaving his palace.
- **Worshipping the Bodhi tree, the stupa, and setting in motion the wheel of dharma (Figs. 4.14–4.16, p. 100):** the three classic aniconic symbols of the Buddha.
- **The woman at the gate / shalabhanjika (Fig. 4.17, p. 101) and Gajalakshmi (Fig. 4.19, p. 102):** popular motifs absorbed into Buddhist iconography.
- **Bodhisatta from Gandhara (Fig. 4.29, p. 108):** note Greek-influenced clothing and hairstyle.
- **Kailashnatha temple at Ellora (Fig. 4.28, p. 107):** entire eighth-century temple carved from a single rock.
- **Timeline 1 — Major Religious Developments (p. 110):** memorise the five date-event pairs.

- **Timeline 2 — Discovery and Preservation (p. 110):** key markers — 1814 Indian Museum Calcutta, 1854 Cunningham's Bhilsa Topes, 1880 H.H. Cole as Curator, 1888 Treasure Trove Act, 1914 Marshall–Foucher **Monuments of Sanchi**, 1989 Sanchi declared World Heritage Site.

## 2.5 Timeline / Key events

Year / Period	Event	Significance
c. 1500–1000 BCE	Composition of the Rigveda	Earliest Sanskrit text — sacrificial Vedic religion (NCERT §4.1, p. 84)
c. 6th c. BCE	Lifetime of Mahavira (24th Tirthankara) and Gautama Buddha; growth of Upanishadic thought	Sramana traditions emerge (NCERT §4.2, p. 85)
c. 5th c. BCE	First Buddhist Council at Rajagaha, immediately after the Buddha's nibbana	Vinaya & Sutta finalised (NCERT §4.3, p. 88)
c. 4th c. BCE	Second Buddhist Council at Vesali (Vaishali)	Three Pitakas compiled (NCERT p. 88)
c. 3rd c. BCE	Asoka patronises Buddhism; Third Council at Pataliputra	Buddhist missions sent out (NCERT p. 89)
c. 3rd c. BCE	Stupas at Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati begun in basic form	Earliest Buddhist architecture (NCERT p. 95)
c. 1st c. BCE	Toranas (gateways) added at Sanchi by satavahana donors	(NCERT §4.6, p. 97)
c. 1st c. CE	Rise of Mahayana Buddhism; Bodhisattva ideal develops	New devotional turn (NCERT §4.7, p. 105)
c. 1st–3rd c. CE	Gandhara and Mathura schools produce first Buddha images	Iconic representation (NCERT pp. 105, 108)
c. 4th–5th c. CE	Puranic Hinduism crystallises around Vishnu and Shiva	Bhakti-cum-temple worship (NCERT §4.7, p. 106)
7th c. CE	Xuan Zang visits Nalanda; reports Buddhist learning	(NCERT p. 89)
8th c. CE	Kailashnatha temple at Ellora carved	High point of monolithic temple architecture (NCERT Fig. 4.28, p. 107)
1796 CE	Amaravati stupa "discovered" by Colonel Colin Mackenzie and looted	(NCERT §4.5, p. 92)
1814 CE	Indian Museum founded at Calcutta	Early colonial museum (NCERT p. 110)
1818 CE	Sanchi rediscovered by General Taylor	Beginning of Sanchi conservation (NCERT p. 96)

Year / Period	Event	Significance
1854 CE	Alexander Cunningham publishes <i>The Bhilsa Topes</i>	First systematic study of Sanchi (NCERT p. 110)
1880 CE	H.H. Cole appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments	Preservation movement (NCERT p. 110)
1888 CE	Treasure Trove Act	Statutory protection of antiquities (NCERT p. 110)
1914 CE	Marshall-Foucher <i>The Monuments of Sanchi</i> published	Definitive monograph (NCERT p. 110)
1989 CE	Sanchi declared UNESCO World Heritage Site	Global recognition (NCERT p. 110)

## 2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Hinayana vs Theravada:** Mahayana supporters called the older tradition "Hinayana" (lesser vehicle), but its own followers called themselves Theravada — NTA loves swapping these.
- **Four sacred sites map-trap:** Lumbini = birth, Bodh Gaya = enlightenment, Sarnath = first sermon, Kusinagara = nibbana. Sarnath and Bodh Gaya are often switched.
- **Three Pitakas:** Vinaya = monastic rules, Sutta = teachings, Abhidhamma = philosophy. The Buddhist council that compiled them met at Vesali (= Vaishali).
- **Number of tirthankaras:** 24 total, of which Mahavira was the last; he was preceded by 23 — students often misread this as "23 in total".
- **Sanchi was discovered in 1818 and survived; Amaravati was "discovered" in 1796 and was looted** — H.H. Cole's plea for in situ preservation succeeded at Sanchi but failed at Amaravati. Do not flip the dates.
- **Anda vs harmika vs yashti vs chhatra:** anda is the mound, harmika the balcony "abode of the gods", yashti the mast, chhatra the umbrella. NTA pairs them in match-the-following.
- **Ajivikas = fatalists (Makkhali Gosala); Lokayatas = materialists (Ajita Kesakambalin).** Easy to confuse.
- **Ananda persuaded the Buddha to admit women;** Mahapajapati Gotami (the Buddha's foster mother) was the first bhikkhuni — not Ananda's mother and not the Buddha's biological mother.

## Practice MCQs

### PYQ Alignment

This chapter is a high-yield CUET History unit — past papers (2023–25) typically draw 12–15 MCQs from it, concentrated on the Buddha's life events and four sacred sites, the structure of the Sanchi stupa (anda/harmika/yashti/chhatri/toranas/vedika), the three Pitakas and the Vesali council, Jaina concepts (tirthankaras, ahimsa, five vows), Mahayana–Theravada distinctions, and aniconic symbolism (empty seat, wheel, Bodhi tree). Expect at least one match-the-following on stupa parts and one statement-based question on Buddhist philosophy (anicca/anatta/dukkha).

#### CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.11 (CUET 2023)** Identify the historian who considered Sindh to be a centre of tree and serpent worship.

- A) Colin Mackenzie B) James Prinsep C) James Fergusson D) H. H. Cole **Tests:** Early religious traditions — sacred groves, tree and serpent worship **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.12 (CUET 2023)** Which of the following texts is related to Jainism? A. Uttaradhyayana Sutra B. Digha Nikaya C. Abhidhamma Pitaka D. Tripitaka

- A) A only B) B only C) A and D D) B and C **Tests:** Jaina canonical texts and Buddhist Tipitaka **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.13 (CUET 2023)** Which statements regarding Buddhism are correct? A. Buddhism grew rapidly during Buddha's lifetime. B. It attracted many followers. C. It rejected Brahmanical rituals. D. It promoted sacrifice rituals.

- A) A, B and C B) B and C only C) A and D only D) A, B, C and D **Tests:** Spread of Buddhism and rejection of Brahmanical ritual **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.14 (CUET 2023)** Arrange the following in chronological order. A. First Stupa B. Early Upanishads C. Early Vedic Tradition D. Mahayana Buddhism

- A) C, B, A, D B) B, C, A, D C) D, C, B, A D) C, A, B, D **Tests:** Chronology of religious traditions — Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.63 (CUET 2023)** Gautama Buddha was born in:

- A) Lumbini B) Bodh Gaya C) Sarnath D) Kushinagar **Tests:** Life of the Buddha — Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.64 (CUET 2023)** The first sermon of Buddha was delivered at:

- A) Lumbini B) Sarnath C) Rajgir D) Vaishali **Tests:** Life of the Buddha — Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Kushinagar **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.65 (CUET 2023)** The Buddhist council that compiled the Tripitaka was held at:

- A) Vaishali B) Rajgir C) Pataliputra D) Sarnath **Tests:** Buddhist Councils and the compilation of the Tipitaka **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.66 (CUET 2023)** Jainism was founded by:

- A) Mahavira B) Buddha C) Ashoka D) Chandragupta Maurya **Tests:** Jainism — Mahavira and the Jain tradition **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.67 (CUET 2023)** Mahavira belonged to the:

- A) Kshatriya clan B) Brahmin clan C) Vaishya clan D) Shudra clan **Tests:** Jainism — Mahavira and the Jain tradition **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.48 (CUET 2024)** Who was the first woman to be ordained as bhikkhuni?

- A) Sigala B) Karuni Pajapati C) Mahapajapati Gotami D) Punna **Tests:** Women in the Sangha — Mahapajapati Gotami and the bhikkhuni order **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.50 (CUET 2024)** Which of the following statements are not correct? (A) Vinay Pitaka does not describe the rules for monks. (B) Buddhism grew only after the death of Buddha. (C) Sutta Pitaka are the verses composed by bhikkhunis. (D) Punna was a rich land-lady. (E) The word Chaitya may have been derived from the word chita. Options:

- A) (D) and (E) only B) (A), (B) and (D) only C) (C) and (E) only D) (B), (D) and (E) only **Tests:** Tipitaka, the early Sangha and the origin of chaityas **Answer:** Not in extracted key

### CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

**Q.8 (CUET 2025)** The Buddha regarded the social world as the creation of:

- A) Humans B) Plants C) Lord Brahma D) Lord Vishnu **Tests:** The Buddha's view of the social world as human-made **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.9 (CUET 2025)** Who persuaded Buddha to allow women into the Sangha?

- A) Ajatasattu B) Makkhali Gosala C) Mahapajapati Gotami D) Ananda **Tests:** Women in the Sangha — Mahapajapati Gotami and Ananda **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.33 (CUET 2025)** Match Countries with Thinkers: Country Thinker Iran Zoroaster China Kong Zi Greece Plato and Aristotle India Mahavira and Buddha Options:

- A) A-III, B-IV, C-I, D-II B) A-III, B-I, C-IV, D-II C) A-II, B-III, C-IV, D-I D) A-III, B-IV, C-II, D-I **Tests:** Sixth-century BCE intellectual ferment — Zoroaster, Kong Zi, Greek philosophers, Mahavira and the Buddha **Answer:** Not in extracted key

**Q.34 (CUET 2025)** According to which Buddhist text did Ashoka distribute Buddha's relics and build stupas?

- A) Ashokavadana B) Sutta Pitaka C) Vinaya Pitaka D) Mahaparinibbana Sutta **Tests:** Ashokavadana and Ashoka's distribution of the Buddha's relics **Answer:** Not in extracted key