

TNPSC Group II / IIA — History & Culture

Revision Pack · quick notes + practice MCQs with answer key

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A. Quick Revision Notes

Indus Valley Civilisation

Bronze Age Harappan civilisation, c.2500–1900 BCE. Harappa discovered 1921 (Daya Ram Sahni), Mohenjo-daro 1922 (R.D. Banerji). Key sites: Mohenjo-daro (Great Bath, Great Granary), Harappa, Dholavira & Lothal in Gujarat (Lothal = dockyard), Kalibangan (ploughed field), Rakhigarhi (largest). Features: grid-pattern town planning, standardised baked bricks, underground drainage, uniform weights and measures. Script pictographic, undeciphered, written right-to-left (boustrophedon). Trade with Mesopotamia. Worship of Pashupati (proto-Shiva) and Mother Goddess. Chalcolithic (used copper/bronze, no iron). Declined around 1900 BCE.

Vedic Age

c.1500–600 BCE, Indo-Aryans. Four Vedas: Rig (oldest, 1028 hymns, 10 mandalas), Sama, Yajur, Atharva. Early/Rig Vedic (1500–1000 BCE) on Sapta-Sindhu region: pastoral, cattle as wealth, tribal polity, king = rajan, sabha and samiti assemblies. Later Vedic (1000–600 BCE): moved to Ganga plains, iron (krishna ayas), settled agriculture, rigid varna system, larger janapadas. Gayatri mantra (to god Savitri) is in the Rig Veda. 'Satyameva Jayate' is from the Mundaka Upanishad. Upanishads are the philosophical end of the Vedas (Vedanta).

Mauryan & Gupta Empires

Mauryas founded 321 BCE by Chandragupta Maurya, guided by Chanakya/Kautilya (Arthashastra); capital Pataliputra; Megasthenes (Indica) was Greek envoy. Ashoka (268–232 BCE): Kalinga war 261 BCE led him to Buddhism and Dhamma; rock and pillar edicts in Brahmi; Sarnath Lion Capital is India's national emblem. Guptas (c.319–550 CE), the 'Golden Age': Samudragupta (Prayag/Allahabad Prashasti by Harisena), Chandragupta II Vikramaditya (defeated Shakas; Fa-Hien visited). Achievements: Aryabhata (zero, decimal), Kalidasa, Nalanda university, temple architecture.

Sangam Age & Ancient Tamilakam

c.300 BCE–300 CE. Three Tamil dynasties: Chera, Chola, Pandya. Three Sangams (assemblies of poets) held at Madurai under Pandya patronage. Literature: Tolkappiyam (oldest Tamil grammar, by Tolkappiyar), Ettuthogai (Eight Anthologies), Pattupattu (Ten Idylls), Pathinenkilkanakku (includes Thirukkural by Thiruvalluvar). Twin epics: Silappatikaram (Ilango Adigal) and Manimekalai (Sattanar). Society organised into five tinai (landscapes). Ports: Puhar/Kaveripoompattinam, Musiri, Korkai (pearls). Extensive Roman trade (yavanas), attested by coin hoards.

Cholas, Cheras & Pandyas

Imperial Cholas (9th–13th CE) founded by Vijayalaya (850 CE). Rajaraja I (985–1014) built the Brihadisvara (Rajarajeswaram) temple at Thanjavur (UNESCO) and a strong navy. Rajendra I reached the Ganga (Gangaikonda Cholapuram) and led a naval expedition to Srivijaya (SE Asia). Famed for local self-government — the Uttiramerur inscriptions describe kudavolai (election by lot) and Chola bronzes (Nataraja). Pandyas: capital Madurai, Meenakshi temple, pearl trade. Cheras: modern Kerala/Kongu, capital Vanji/Karur, Muziris port.

Delhi Sultanate & Mughals

Delhi Sultanate 1206–1526, five dynasties: Slave/Mamluk (Qutb-ud-din Aibak began Qutb Minar; Iltutmish; Razia Sultana), Khilji (Alauddin — price/market control, Malik Kafur's southern raids), Tughlaq (Muhammad bin Tughlaq — token currency, capital shift to Daulatabad; Firoz Shah), Sayyid, Lodi. First Battle of Panipat 1526: Babur defeated Ibrahim Lodi, founding the Mughals. Akbar (Din-i-Ilahi, Mansabdari, abolished jizya), Shah Jahan (Taj Mahal, Red Fort), Aurangzeb (largest extent, reimposed jizya).

Bhakti & Sufi movements

Bhakti stressed personal devotion, rejecting ritual and caste. In Tamil Nadu (6th–9th CE): Alvars (Vaishnava) and Nayanars (Shaiva). Saints: Ramanuja (Vishishtadvaita), Ramananda, Kabir (nirguna, dohas), Guru Nanak (founded Sikhism), Mirabai, Tulsidas (Ramcharitmanas), Chaitanya, Namdev, Tukaram. Sufism = Islamic mysticism through silsilas: Chishti (Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti at Ajmer; Nizamuddin Auliya) and Suhrawardi. Both movements preached love, tolerance and unity of God, and spread through vernacular languages, easing Hindu-Muslim relations.

Advent of Europeans

Vasco da Gama reached Calicut in 1498 (received by the Zamorin). Portuguese came first — Albuquerque captured Goa in 1510. Dutch East India Company formed 1602 (factory at Pulicat, TN). English East India Company chartered 1600 by Elizabeth I; factories at Surat (1613), Madras/Fort St George 1639 (Francis Day), Bombay, Calcutta. French East India Company 1664, base at Pondicherry (1674), Dupleix. Danes at Tranquebar (Tharangambadi). The Anglo-French Carnatic Wars (1746–63) and Battles of Plassey 1757 and Buxar 1764 established British power.

Revolt of 1857

The First War of Independence (Sepoy Mutiny) began 10 May 1857 at Meerut; immediate cause was greased Enfield cartridges (cow/pig fat). Mangal Pandey (Barrackpore, 29 March 1857) was an early spark. Leaders: Bahadur Shah Zafar (Delhi, symbolic head), Nana Saheb and Tantia Tope (Kanpur), Rani Lakshmibai (Jhansi), Begum Hazrat Mahal (Lucknow), Kunwar Singh (Bihar). Suppressed by 1858. Consequences: end of East India Company rule; Government of India Act 1858; direct Crown rule; Queen Victoria's Proclamation. Tamil Nadu was largely unaffected.

Indian National Movement

Indian National Congress founded 1885 by A.O. Hume; first president W.C. Bonnerjee (Bombay). Phases: Moderates (1885–1905; Dadabhai Naoroji's 'drain of wealth', Gokhale), Extremists (Tilak — 'Swaraj is my birthright'; Lal-Bal-Pal), then the Gandhian mass phase. Partition of Bengal 1905 sparked the Swadeshi movement. Home Rule Leagues 1916 (Tilak, Annie Besant); Lucknow Pact 1916. Gandhi: Champaran 1917, Non-Cooperation 1920–22 (ended after Chauri Chaura), Civil Disobedience/Dandi Salt March 1930, Quit India 1942. Independence on 15 August 1947.

Tamil Nadu in the freedom struggle

V.O. Chidambaram Pillai ('Kappalottiya Tamizhan') launched the Swadeshi Steam Navigation Company in 1906 at Tuticorin to challenge British shipping. Poet Subramania Bharati inspired nationalism ('Vande Mataram' journal). Vanchinathan assassinated Collector Ashe in 1911. Tiruppur Kumaran died holding the national flag (1932). The Salt Satyagraha in TN was led by C. Rajagopalachari (Rajaji) at Vedaranyam in 1930. Rajaji later became the first Indian Governor-General. Congress in TN was strengthened by Satyamurti and K. Kamaraj.

Social & religious reform movements

Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahma Samaj (1828) and helped abolish Sati (1829, with Lord Bentinck); called the 'father of the Indian Renaissance'. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar championed widow remarriage. Dayananda Saraswati founded the Arya Samaj (1875), 'back to the Vedas', with Shuddhi. Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission (1897) after his 1893 Chicago address. Jyotiba Phule started the Satyashodhak Samaj. Annie Besant led the Theosophical Society (headquarters at Adyar, Chennai). Sir Syed Ahmad Khan led the Aligarh Movement.

Dravidian & Self-Respect movement

The Justice Party (South Indian Liberal Federation, 1916) led the non-Brahmin movement and brought the first communal Government Order (reservation) in 1921. Periyar E.V. Ramasamy founded the Self-Respect Movement (Suyamariyathai, 1925) after leaving Congress, promoting social equality, anti-caste rationalism, women's rights and self-respect marriages. He formed the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK) in 1944. C.N. Annadurai broke away to found the DMK in 1949. The anti-Hindi agitations (1937–40 and 1965) were central to the movement, asserting Tamil identity.

Indian art, architecture & culture

Temple styles: Nagara (North, curvilinear shikhara), Dravida (South, pyramidal vimana with gopurams — Cholas), Vesara (Deccan hybrid — Chalukyas/Hoysalas). Rock-cut art: Ajanta (Buddhist paintings), Ellora (Kailasa temple, Rashtrakutas), Elephanta. Dravidian landmarks: Brihadisvara (Thanjavur), Meenakshi (Madurai), Mahabalipuram (Pallava Shore Temple and rathas, UNESCO). Eight classical dances include Bharatanatyam (Tamil Nadu), Kathakali (Kerala), Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi, Manipuri. Carnatic music Trinity: Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri.

B. Practice MCQs (25)

1. The Vedic period is divided into Early Vedic (Rigvedic) and Later Vedic periods. Which of the following best characterises the Later Vedic period?

- (A) Pastoral, nomadic society with little agriculture
- (B) Emergence of settled agriculture, iron technology, and the varna system becoming rigid
- (C) Matriarchal social structure and goddess worship
- (D) Absence of any form of monarchical rule

2. Sangam literature is classified into which two broad categories?

- (A) Akam (love poetry) and Puram (heroic/public poetry)
- (B) Devotional hymns (Bhakti) and epic narratives
- (C) Grammatical texts and didactic literature
- (D) Royal chronicles and temple inscriptions

3. The Bhakti movement in South India is associated with two groups of poet-saints. They are:

- (A) Nayanmars (Shaiva) and Alvars (Vaishnava)
- (B) Lingayats and Virashaivas
- (C) Kabirpanthis and Sikhs
- (D) Charvaka and Ajivika philosophers

4. The First Battle of Panipat (1526) was fought between:

- (A) Babur and Sher Shah Suri
- (B) Akbar and Hemu
- (C) Babur and Ibrahim Lodi
- (D) Humayun and Sher Shah Suri

5. The Revolt of 1857 is termed the 'First War of Indian Independence' by:

- (A) Karl Marx
- (B) V. D. Savarkar
- (C) Jawaharlal Nehru
- (D) Sir Syed Ahmad Khan

6. The Indian National Congress was split into Moderates and Extremists at which session?

- (A) Surat Session, 1907
- (B) Calcutta Session, 1906
- (C) Nagpur Session, 1920
- (D) Lahore Session, 1929

7. The partition of India in 1947 was based on the:

- (A) Cripps Mission proposal
- (B) Cabinet Mission Plan
- (C) Mountbatten Plan (June 3 Plan)
- (D) Wavell Plan

8. The Constituent Assembly of India completed drafting the Constitution on 26 November 1949. How long did the drafting process take?

- (A) 1 year and 2 months
- (B) 2 years, 11 months and 18 days
- (C) 3 years and 6 months
- (D) 5 years exactly

9. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms (1919) introduced which new system of governance in the provinces?

- (A) Diarchy (dyarchy)
- (B) Federal system
- (C) Direct election for all provincial posts
- (D) Decentralisation of all powers to provinces

10. Periyar's Self-Respect Movement advocated which of the following? (Select the BEST description)

- (A) Complete support for Gandhi's Congress and Indian nationalism
- (B) Rational, casteless society, women's rights, and Tamil cultural identity separate from Brahminical norms
- (C) Forming a separate Dravidian nation-state immediately
- (D) Promoting Sanskrit and Vedic learning in Tamil Nadu

11. The Poona Pact (1932) was signed between Mahatma Gandhi and:

- (A) Jawaharlal Nehru
- (B) Muhammad Ali Jinnah
- (C) B. R. Ambedkar
- (D) Rajagopalachari

12. The Gandhara School of Art was influenced by which culture?

- (A) Persian and Egyptian art
- (B) Greco-Roman art
- (C) Chinese Buddhist art
- (D) Dravidian architecture

13. Which Mughal emperor issued the 'Farmans' granting trading privileges to the English East India Company?

- (A) Aurangzeb
- (B) Shah Jahan
- (C) Jahangir
- (D) Farrukhsiyar

14. The Vijayanagara Empire reached its zenith under which ruler in the 16th century?

- (A) Harihara I
- (B) Krishnadevaraya
- (C) Bukka I
- (D) Deva Raya II

15. The 'Doctrine of Lapse' was used by which Governor-General to annex Indian princely states?

- (A) Lord Cornwallis
- (B) Lord Wellesley
- (C) Lord Dalhousie
- (D) Lord Hastings

16. The Cabinet Mission (1946) proposed which type of structure for independent India?

- (A) A unitary centralised state
- (B) A loose confederation of Hindu and Muslim zones with a weak centre
- (C) A federal union with three tiers: Union, Groups of Provinces, Provinces
- (D) Complete partition into India and Pakistan immediately

17. The Lucknow Pact (1916) was an agreement between:

- (A) Gandhi and Lord Chelmsford
- (B) Indian National Congress and Muslim League
- (C) Tilak and Gokhale's factions of Congress
- (D) Khilafat leaders and British government

18. Who among the following founded the Brahmo Samaj in 1828?

- (A) Swami Vivekananda
- (B) Dayananda Saraswati
- (C) Ram Mohan Roy
- (D) Keshab Chandra Sen

19. The Treaty of Salbai (1782) ended which conflict?

- (A) First Anglo-Maratha War
- (B) Second Anglo-Maratha War
- (C) First Anglo-Mysore War
- (D) Third Anglo-Maratha War

20. The Tebhaga Movement (1946–47) in Bengal was a peasant uprising demanding:

- (A) Abolition of zamindari system entirely
- (B) Two-thirds share of the crop for sharecroppers instead of one-half
- (C) Land redistribution to landless labourers
- (D) Removal of salt tax on rural communities

21. The Indus Valley Civilisation's town planning is best evidenced by which unique feature found at Mohenjo-daro?

- (A) Grid-pattern streets with a covered drainage system
- (B) Iron smelting furnaces
- (C) Large stone temples
- (D) Sanskrit inscriptions on pillars

22. Which Mauryan emperor issued the Edict at Dhauli (Odisha) expressing remorse after the Kalinga War?

- (A) Ashoka
- (B) Chandragupta Maurya
- (C) Bindusara
- (D) Brihadratha

23. The Gupta period is called the 'Golden Age' primarily because of advances in which field?

- (A) Development of the caste system
- (B) Literature, science, mathematics and art
- (C) Maritime trade with Rome only
- (D) Military conquests and territorial expansion

24. Who founded the Vijayanagara Empire in 1336 CE?

- (A) Krishnadevaraya
- (B) Prataparudra
- (C) Harihara I and Bukka I
- (D) Malik Kafur

25. The Bhakti movement's concept of nirgun bhakti (devotion to a formless God) was most closely associated with which saint?

- (A) Tukaram
- (B) Mirabai
- (C) Kabir
- (D) Ramanuja

C. Answer Key & Explanations

1. **(B)** The Later Vedic period (c.1000–600 BCE) saw the shift from a nomadic pastoral society to settled agriculture in the Gangetic plains, the use of iron implements, and the increasing rigidity of the varna system.
2. **(A)** Classical Sangam Tamil poetry is divided into Akam (interior — love themes) and Puram (exterior — war, death, praise of kings), a classification found in the Tolkappiyam grammar.
3. **(A)** The South Indian Bhakti movement (6th–9th centuries CE) was led by 63 Nayanmars (Shaiva saints) and 12 Alvars (Vaishnava saints).
4. **(C)** The First Battle of Panipat on 21 April 1526 was between Babur (founder of the Mughal Empire) and Ibrahim Lodi (the last Sultan of the Delhi Sultanate). Babur's victory founded the Mughal Empire.
5. **(B)** Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in his 1909 book 'The Indian War of Independence — 1857' characterised the revolt as the first organised war for Indian independence.
6. **(A)** The INC split at the Surat Session of 1907, where Tilak's Extremists clashed with the Moderates (led by Gokhale) over the choice of Congress president.
7. **(C)** The Mountbatten Plan (announced on 3 June 1947) provided the framework for the partition of British India into two dominions — India and Pakistan.
8. **(B)** The Constituent Assembly first met on 9 December 1946 and completed the Constitution on 26 November 1949 — a period of 2 years, 11 months, and 18 days.
9. **(A)** The Government of India Act 1919 introduced dyarchy in the provinces — some subjects were 'transferred' to elected Indian ministers and others 'reserved' for the British Governor.
10. **(B)** Periyar's Self-Respect Movement (1925) promoted rationalism, rejection of caste hierarchy, gender equality, and Tamil cultural identity free from Brahminical dominance.
11. **(C)** The Poona Pact (September 1932) was signed between Gandhi and Ambedkar, resolving the crisis created by the Communal Award which had granted separate electorates to Depressed Classes.
12. **(B)** The Gandhara School of Art (1st–5th centuries CE) blended Indian Buddhist themes with Hellenistic artistic conventions, producing realistic depictions of the Buddha.

13. **(D)** Emperor Farrukhsiyar issued the famous Farman of 1717 granting the English East India Company extensive trading privileges including exemption from customs duties in Bengal.
14. **(B)** Krishnadevaraya (r. 1509–1529) is considered the greatest Vijayanagara ruler — a brilliant military commander, patron of Telugu and Kannada literature, and author of Amuktamalyada.
15. **(C)** Lord Dalhousie (Governor-General 1848–1856) used the Doctrine of Lapse to annex Satara, Jhansi, Nagpur, and others.
16. **(C)** The Cabinet Mission Plan proposed a three-tier federal structure: an Indian Union handling defence, foreign affairs, and communications; Group A, B, and C clusters of provinces; and individual provinces.
17. **(B)** The Lucknow Pact of 1916 was a landmark agreement between the INC (led by Tilak) and the All India Muslim League (led by Jinnah), presenting a joint demand for constitutional reforms.
18. **(C)** Raja Ram Mohan Roy founded the Brahmo Samaj in Calcutta in 1828, advocating monotheism, opposition to idol worship, sati, and child marriage, and promoting women's education.
19. **(A)** The Treaty of Salbai (May 1782) ended the First Anglo-Maratha War (1775–82), restoring the status quo ante.
20. **(B)** The Tebhaga Movement in Bengal demanded that sharecroppers receive two-thirds of the crop instead of the customary half-share that went to landlords.
21. **(A)** Mohenjo-daro and Harappa display grid-planned streets and an advanced underground drainage system, unparalleled in the ancient world.
22. **(A)** Ashoka's Major Rock Edicts, especially the 13th, describe the horror of the Kalinga War (261 BCE) and his consequent conversion to dhamma.
23. **(B)** The Gupta era (4th–6th century CE) produced Kalidasa's literature, Aryabhata's mathematics (zero, pi approximation), Varahamihira's astronomy, and Ajanta cave paintings.
24. **(C)** Brothers Harihara I and Bukka I, formerly commanders in the Hoysala and Kakatiya armies, founded Vijayanagara on the banks of the Tungabhadra in 1336.
25. **(C)** Kabir (15th–16th century) rejected idol worship, caste distinctions, and external religious ritual, advocating direct love for a formless, nameless divine.