

Mains PYQs - GS-I (2026) (Q. 1 - 3)

1. Analyse the importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history. (150 words, 10 marks)

Directions: Intro-----Importance + Limitations-----Conclusion.

Introduction:

Describe the Mauryan Empire (322 BCE to 185 BCE) & reign of Ashoka (c. 268-232 BCE) briefly.

Ashokan inscriptions were first deciphered by James Prinsep in 1837.

Main Body

Importance of Ashokan inscriptions for reconstructing Mauryan history

- Territorial extent – Wide geographical reach of Mauryan authority from Afghanistan to Karnataka and Odisha.

- North-West Frontier:
Kandahar (Afghanistan) and Shahbazgarhi (Pakistan).
- Southern Limits:
Maski, Brahmagiri, and Yerragudi.
- Eastern Border:
The Dhauli and Jaugada rock edicts in Odisha.

- Border Kingdoms – Southern neighbours (Cholas, Pandyas, Satyaputras, Keralaputras, and Tamraparni/Sri Lanka). Eg. Major Rock Edicts II & XIII
- Administration & Governance – Centralised administration, appointment of officials - Rajukas, Pradesikas, Yuktas, Dhamma Mahamattas, etc. – Arthashastra.

- Paternal Kingship - Kalinga Edicts - explicitly state, "All men are my children," transforming the concept of kingship from an autocracy to a paternalistic autocracy.
- Policy of Dhamma - Obedience to parents, generosity to Brahmins and ascetics, kindness to slaves, and non-injury (ahimsa) to living beings.
- Language - Linguistic Pluralism - uses Prakrit language - written in Brahmi, Kharosthi, Aramaic, and Greek scripts.
- Religion - Buddhism and Jainism are more popular, follows religious tolerance.
- Diplomacy/Foreign relations - Diplomatic ties with Hellenistic kings—including Antiochus II of Syria, Ptolemy II of Egypt, and Alexander of Epirus.

Limitations

- Reflect Ashoka's perspective, rather than providing a complete Mauryan history.
- Limited information about Chandragupta Maurya and Bindusara.
- Little detail on military organisation, economic administration and everyday social life.
- The implementation of the instructions is very limited.

Conclusion:

Give a balanced conclusion.

Ashokan inscriptions form the backbone of the reconstruction of Mauryan history - Arthashastra (source for modern administration).

2. Discuss the impact of Macaulay's Minute on colonial administration and education in India. (150 words, 10 marks)

Directions: Intro----- impact on colonial administration and education-----Conclusion.

Introduction:

Describe Macaulay's Minute (1835).

Main Body

Impact on colonial administration

- Creation of workforce & cheap labour
- English - administrative and important language
- Leads to westernisation of administration
- Promotes national and political awakening - ideals of liberalism, rationalism, etc.
- Creation of equality
- Legal Modernisation - Macaulay's leadership of the First Law Commission (1834) - Indian Penal Code (1860).
- Rise of professional classes like lawyers, journalists, teachers, and other professionals.

Impact on education

- Neglect of indigenous language - English as a medium replaced Persian and Sanskrit.
- Shift towards Western education from traditional education
- Modern thoughts of science, philosophy, European literature, political ideas, etc got introduced
- Decline of traditional institutions - pathshalas, madrasas, etc.
- Downward filtration theory - Neglected mass schooling - focused on elites.

Conclusion:

Give a balanced conclusion.

Designed to create an English-educated intermediary class to serve colonial administrative needs, but it also helped create the intellectual foundations of anti-colonial nationalism.

3. The significance of the Gandhian movements lay in the masses they mobilised. Elucidate. (150 words, 10 marks)

Direction: Intro-----Significance-----Conclusion.

Introduction:

Describe the Gandhian era (1917-1947) and Gandhian Movements in India briefly.

Transformed the INM from a largely elite-led political struggle into a broad-based mass movement.

Main Body

Significance of mass mobilization

- Political awakening
- From Elite movement to Mass Nationalism - Congress was primarily an elite political party.
- Expansion of social base - Includes peasants, workers. Women, students and youth, tribal and marginalised groups, etc.
- Bridging rural urban divide
- Awakening against social evils - Eg, Untouchability.
- Used simple symbols - Promoted use of salt, khadi, charkha and boycott.
- Promotes economic self-reliance by promoting swadeshi industries.
- Promotes religious unity - Hindus, Muslims, also includes Sikhs, etc.

Conclusion:

Give a balanced conclusion.

Gandhian era was not merely the individual victories of its campaigns but the democratisation of the freedom struggle - converting Swaraj from an elite political demand into a popular aspiration.

