Religious Movements, Mahajanapadas & Mauryan Empire

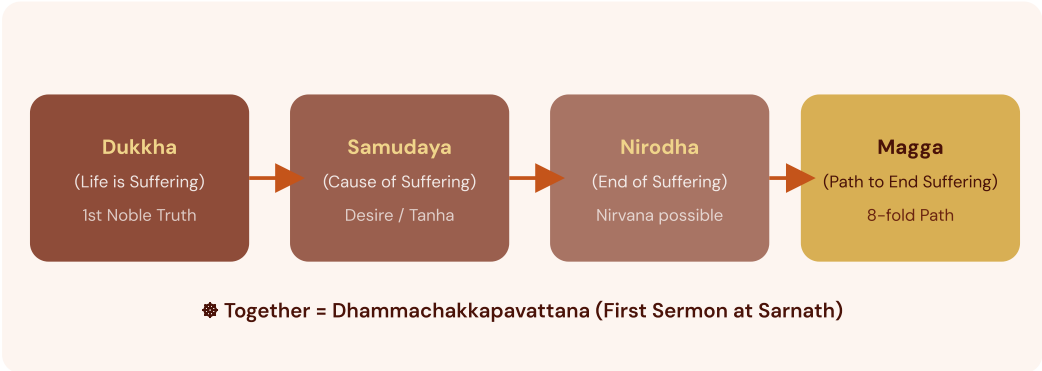
📚 HC02 · Ancient India – II · Chapter 2 of 3 CDS Level

1. Buddhism

📌 **Gautam Buddha:** Born ~563 BCE at **Lumbini** (Nepal) as *Siddhartha Gautama*, of the **Shakya** clan. Father: Suddhodana (king); Mother: Mahamaya (died shortly after birth); Foster mother: Mahaprajapati Gautami. Wife: Yashodhara; Son: Rahula. Attained **Enlightenment** at **Bodh Gaya** (Bihar) under a Peepal tree at age 35. Gave first sermon (**Dhammachakkapavattana**) at **Sarnath** (Deer Park, Varanasi). Died (Mahaparinirvana) at **Kushinagar** (UP) at age 80.

1.1 Four Noble Truths (Arya Satyas) High Frequency PYQ

☸ FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS — CONCEPTUAL DIAGRAM



1.2 Eightfold Path (Ashtangika Marga) — Middle Path

☸ The Eight Steps

📚 Buddhist Texts & Concepts

- **Right View** — understand Four Noble Truths
- **Right Intention** — renounce worldly desires
- **Right Speech** — truthful, non-harmful words
- **Right Action** — no killing, stealing, lying
- **Right Livelihood** — earn honestly
- **Right Effort** — overcome evil thoughts
- **Right Mindfulness** — awareness of body/mind
- **Right Concentration** — meditation (Samadhi)

- **Tripitaka** — three "baskets": Vinaya (rules), Sutta (discourses), Abhidhamma (philosophy)
- **Dhamma** — the teaching/law of Buddha
- **Sangha** — Buddhist monastic community
- **Nirvana** — liberation from cycle of rebirth
- **Ahimsa** — non-violence (core principle)
- Language: **Pali** (early Buddhism); Sanskrit (Mahayana)
- No God concept — middle path between extreme asceticism and luxury

1.3 Buddhist Councils

Very High Frequency

Council	Year (BCE)	Place	King	President	Result
1st Council	483 BCE	Rajagriha (Sattapanni Cave)	Ajatashatru	Mahakassapa	Compiled Sutta Pitaka & Vinaya Pitaka
2nd Council	383 BCE	Vaishali	Kalasoka	Sabakami	Schism — Sthaviravada vs Mahasanghika
3rd Council	250 BCE	Pataliputra	Ashoka	Moggaliputta Tissa	Compiled Abhidhamma Pitaka; spread to Sri Lanka
4th Council	72 CE	Kundalvana, Kashmir	Kanishka	Vasumitra (Ashwaghosha dep.)	Split — Hinayana vs Mahayana Buddhism

🔺 **Exam Trap:** The **4th Buddhist Council** was held under **Kanishka** (Kushana king), NOT Ashoka. Ashoka presided over the **3rd Council**. Also: the split between Hinayana (Theravada) and Mahayana happened at the **4th Council**, not the 2nd. The 2nd Council split was Sthaviravada vs Mahasanghika.

1.4 Decline of Buddhism in India

💡 **Key Reasons:** (1) **Brahmanical revival** — Pushyamitra Shunga persecuted Buddhists; (2) **Muslim invasions** — Nalanda, Vikramashila destroyed (Bakhtiyar Khilji, 12th century); (3) **Absorption into Hinduism** — Buddha made an avatar of Vishnu; (4) **Loss of royal patronage**; (5) Corruption in Sangha. Buddhism survived outside India but declined within.

2. Jainism

📌 **Mahavira (24th Tirthankara):** Born ~599 BCE at **Vaishali** (Bihar) as *Vardhamana*. His father Siddhartha was a Kshatriya chief. Attained **Kaivalya** (enlightenment) at Jrimbhikagrama at age 42. Died at **Pavapuri** (Rajgir, Bihar) at age 72. First Tirthankara = **Rishabhadeva/Adinath**. 23rd = **Parshvanatha** (preached Four Vows). Mahavira added **Brahmacharya** (celibacy) as the 5th vow.

2.1 Five Vows (Pancha Mahavratas) PYQ Favourite

1 Ahimsa
Non-violence

Most important Jain principle. Not harming any living being, including insects and micro-organisms. Jains cover their mouths to avoid inhaling organisms.

2 Satya
Truthfulness

Always speak truth. Avoid speech that harms others, even if factually true. Truth must be aligned with Ahimsa.

3 Asteya
Non-stealing

4 Aparigraha
Non-possession

Do not take anything not given. Includes not exploiting others through unfair means or manipulation.

Detachment from material possessions. Digambaras take it to the extreme — no clothing. Svetambaras allow minimal possessions.

5

Brahmacharya

Celibacy — Added by Mahavira

Parshvanatha preached only four vows. Mahavira added **Brahmacharya** as the 5th. This is a high-frequency PYQ point.

Added by Mahavira

2.2 Jain Sects & Councils

⚖️ Digambara vs Svetambara

- **Digambara** — "Sky-clad"; monks wear no clothes; Mahavira never married (their view); women cannot attain moksha in this birth
- **Svetambara** — "White-clad"; monks wear white robes; women can attain moksha; Mahavira married Yashoda
- Split occurred ~300 BCE under Chandragupta Maurya era (Bhadrabahu led Digambaras to South India)

📋 Jain Councils

- **1st Jain Council** — Pataliputra; ~300 BCE; President: Sthulabhadra; compiled 12 Angas (canon)
- **2nd Jain Council** — Vallabhi (Gujarat); ~512 CE; President: Devardhigani; finalised canon in written form
- Jain texts called **Agamas**
- Language: **Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit**
- Philosophy: **Anekantavada** (many-sidedness of truth) and **Syadvada** (conditional predication)

💡 **Buddhism vs Jainism — Key Differences:** Buddhism focuses on *mental discipline* and the Middle Path; Jainism emphasises *extreme non-violence* and physical austerity (Tapa). Buddhism spread widely (Asia); Jainism remained largely within India. Buddhism has no soul concept (Anatta); Jainism has the concept of *Jiva* (soul). Both reject Vedic authority and the caste system.

3. Mahajanapadas & Rise of Magadha

📌 **16 Mahajanapadas** (6th–4th century BCE): As per the Buddhist text *Anguttara Nikaya*, there were 16 major kingdoms. Key ones: **Magadha** (Bihar — dominant), **Kosala** (UP), **Vajji** (republican), **Kuru**, **Panchala**, **Avanti** (MP), **Gandhara** (NW), **Kamboja**. Magadha was the most powerful and eventually absorbed all others.

3.1 Dynasties of Magadha High Priority

Dynasty	Period	Capital	Notable Rulers
Haryanka	544–412 BCE	Rajagriha	Bimbisara (first great king), Ajatashatru (killed Bimbisara; expanded Magadha; fought Vajji)
Shishunaga	412–344 BCE	Vaishali, then Pataliputra	Shishunaga, Kalasoka (2nd Buddhist Council)
Nanda	344–321 BCE	Pataliputra	Mahapadma Nanda (first empire builder); Dhana Nanda (last — defeated by Chandragupta). First non-Kshatriya dynasty.
Maurya	321–185 BCE	Pataliputra	Chandragupta, Bindusara, Ashoka — greatest empire of ancient India

🟢 **Mnemonic for Magadha Dynasties: H-S-N-M** = *"History Shines in Nanda-Maurya"* → Haryanka → Shishunaga → Nanda → Maurya. All had capital at **Pataliputra** (modern Patna) from Shishunaga onwards.

4. Mauryan Empire (321–185 BCE)

4.1 Chandragupta Maurya (321–297 BCE)

📌 **Key Facts:** Founded the Mauryan Empire with guidance of **Chanakya (Kautilya/Vishnugupta)**. Defeated Dhana Nanda (Nanda dynasty) and Greek Seleucus Nicator (~305 BCE — received trans-Indus territories). Greek ambassador **Megasthenes** sent by Seleucus → wrote *Indica*. Chandragupta later converted to **Jainism**, went to

Shravanabelagola (Karnataka) with Bhadrabahu, and died by Sallekhana (Jain fasting-unto-death).

📖 Arthashastra (Kautilya)

- Treatise on statecraft, economic policy, military strategy
- Describes the role of the king (*Raja*), ministers, spies
- Rediscovered by R. Shamasastry in 1905
- Discusses Saptanga theory (7 elements of state)
- Also mentions foreign policy — Mandala theory
- Describes detailed taxation, market regulation, irrigation

📖 Indica (Megasthenes)

- Greek ambassador at Chandragupta's court in Pataliputra
- Describes Mauryan administration and social life
- Mentions the city of Palibothra (Pataliputra)
- Talks about 7 castes in Indian society
- Original lost — fragments preserved in later Greek works
- Valuable external source for Mauryan history

4.2 Ashoka the Great (268–232 BCE) Highest Priority — CDS

Ashoka is the most frequently tested Mauryan ruler in CDS. His Dhamma, edicts, and the Kalinga War are core exam content.

⚖️ ASHOKA'S TRANSFORMATION — THE KALINGA TURNING POINT

4.3 Ashoka's Dhamma — Principles

DHAMMA — KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Ahimsa** — respect for all life; stopped animal sacrifices
- **Tolerance** — respect for all religions and sects

- **Dana** — charity, generosity to Brahmins, hermits, the poor
- **Satya** — truthfulness in conduct
- **Shaucham** — purity of conduct
- **Not a religion** — Dhamma is a moral code, not Buddhism-exclusive
- Spread through **Dhamma Mahamattas** (special officers for Dhamma)

4.4 Ashokan Edicts CDS Favourite

Type of Edict	Number	Content/Significance	Notable Examples
Major Rock Edicts	14	Dhamma principles, administration, social welfare	13th MRE = Kalinga War remorse; 12th = religious tolerance
Minor Rock Edicts	Several	Personal conversion, Dhamma instruction	Bairat, Maski, Gurjara — explicitly mention "Ashoka"
Pillar Edicts	7 Major + Minor	Laws, animal protection, administration	Delhi-Topra pillar (most inscriptions); Rampurwa (Bihar)
Cave Inscriptions	3	For Ajivika monks in Barabar Hills	Sudama, Lomasha Rishi, Vishvakarma caves (Gaya, Bihar)

▲ **Critical Points:** Edicts written in **Brahmi** (most; deciphered by James Prinsep, 1837), **Kharoshthi** (NW India), **Aramaic** and **Greek** (Afghanistan). **Maski** and **Gurjara** edicts first mentioned "Ashoka" by name — before that, he was referred to as "Devanampiya Piyadasi" (Beloved of Gods, Pleasing to Behold). Pillar edicts are polished using **Mauryan polish** technique.

4.5 Mauryan Art & Architecture

🏛️ Pillars & Capitals

- **Lion Capital, Sarnath** — National Emblem of India; four lions back-to-back on abacus with dharma chakra

🗿 Stupas & Other Structures

- **Sanchi Stupa** — originally built by Ashoka; later enlarged; Madhya Pradesh

- Pillars: Single piece of polished sandstone; bell-shaped (Persian influence)
- Rampurwa Bull Capital — Bihar
- Pataliputra Capital — Patna Museum
- "Mauryan polish" — mirror-like shine technique unique to this era

- **Bharhut Stupa** — Madhya Pradesh; sculptural narrative panels
- 83 stupas said to be built by Ashoka (including at Bodh Gaya, Sarnath)
- Barabar Caves (Bihar) — earliest rock-cut caves in India
- Pataliputra palace — described by Megasthenes; compared to Persian Persepolis

4.6 Literary Sources for Mauryan History

Arthashastra
Kautilya / Chanakya

Treatise on statecraft, political economy, military strategy. Rediscovered 1905 by R. Shamasastry in Mysore. Most important primary source for Mauryan governance.

Primary Source | Sanskrit

Indica
Megasthenes (Greek)

Account of Greek ambassador at Chandragupta's court. Describes city of Pataliputra, Indian society, administration. Original lost; fragments in Strabo, Arrian, Diodorus.

Greek Source | External

Mudrarakshasa
Vishakhadatta (Drama)

Sanskrit play about Chandragupta's rise to power with Chanakya's help against Nanda dynasty. Written in Gupta period (~4th–5th century CE). Not contemporary — but useful.

Sanskrit Drama | Gupta era

Memory Chart — Quick Revision Sheet

☸ Buddha — 5 Key Locations

- **Lumbini** — Birth (Nepal)
- **Bodh Gaya** — Enlightenment (Bihar)
- **Sarnath** — First Sermon (UP)
- **Vaishali** — Last sermon (Bihar)
- **Kushinagar** — Death/Mahaparinirvana (UP)

📋 Buddhist Councils — 4 Kings

- 1st Council → **Ajatashatru** (Haryanka)
- 2nd Council → **Kalasoka** (Shishunaga)
- 3rd Council → **Ashoka** (Maurya)
- 4th Council → **Kanishka** (Kushana)
- Mnemonic: **A-K-A-K**
- Venues: Rajagriha → Vaishali → Pataliputra → Kashmir

⚖️ Jainism — Key Facts

- Mahavira born: **Vaishali**
- Enlightenment: **Jrimbhikagrama**
- Death: **Pavapuri**
- 5th vow added: **Brahmacharya**
- 1st Tirthankara: **Rishabhadeva**
- 23rd Tirthankara: **Parshvanatha**
- Sect split: **Digambara vs Svetambara**

🏛 Maurya — Key Rulers

- Chandragupta: **321–297 BCE**
- Defeated: **Dhana Nanda & Seleucus**
- Bindusara: **"Amitraghata"** (slayer of foes)
- Ashoka: **268–232 BCE**
- Kalinga War: **261 BCE**
- Maurya ended: **185 BCE** (Pushyamitra Shunga)
- Chanakya's book: **Arthashastra**

📜 Ashoka's Edicts — Quick

- Script: **Brahmi** (most common)
- Deciphered by: **James Prinsep (1837)**
- NW: Kharoshthi; Afghanistan: Greek/Aramaic
- Title used: **"Devanampiya Piyadasi"**
- "Ashoka" name: Maski & Gurjara edicts
- 13th Rock Edict = Kalinga War remorse
- Lion Capital = National Emblem of India

🗺 Mahajanapadas — Top 6

- **Magadha** — Bihar; dominant power
- **Kosala** — UP; rival of Magadha
- **Vajji** — Bihar; Vaishali; republic
- **Avanti** — MP; Ujjain/Mahishmati
- **Gandhara** — NW; Taxila (art centre)
- Source: **Anguttara Nikaya** (Buddhist text)

📝 Topic-wise PYQs & Tricky Questions

Q1. The First Buddhist Council was held at Rajagriha under the patronage of which king? PYQ Type

(A) Bimbisara (B) Ajatashatru (C) Ashoka (D) Kanishka

✓ Answer: (B) Ajatashatru

The First Buddhist Council was held at the Sattapanni Cave, Rajagriha, shortly after Buddha's death (~483 BCE), under the patronage of king **Ajatashatru** of the Haryanka dynasty. The council was presided over by Mahakassapa and compiled the Vinaya Pitaka (rules for monks) and Sutta Pitaka (Buddha's teachings). Note: Bimbisara was Ajatashatru's father (whom Ajatashatru killed to gain the throne).

Q2. The 5th vow of Brahmacharya (celibacy) was added to Jainism by: PYQ Type

(A) Rishabhadeva (B) Parshvanatha (C) Mahavira (D) Neminatha

✓ Answer: (C) Mahavira

The 23rd Tirthankara **Parshvanatha** preached four vows: Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, and Aparigraha. **Mahavira** (24th and last Tirthankara) added the 5th vow — *Brahmacharya* (celibacy). This is one of the most frequently tested facts in CDS History. The five vows are called *Pancha Mahavratas* for monks (and *Anuvratas* for lay followers).

Q3. Which of the following edicts of Ashoka mentions his sorrow and repentance after the Kalinga War? PYQ Type

(A) 12th Major Rock Edict (B) 7th Pillar Edict (C) 13th Major Rock Edict

(D) 1st Minor Rock Edict

✓ Answer: (C) 13th Major Rock Edict

The **13th Major Rock Edict** is the most significant — it describes the Kalinga War (261 BCE), the suffering caused (1,00,000 killed, 1,50,000 deported, many more died of disease), and Ashoka's deep remorse that transformed him. The 12th MRE deals with religious tolerance. The 1st Minor Rock Edict talks about his personal conversion. This is a very high-frequency CDS question.

Q4. Who deciphered the Brahmi script used in Ashokan edicts? PYQ Type

(A) Alexander Cunningham (B) James Prinsep (C) John Marshall

(D) Mortimer Wheeler

✓ Answer: (B) James Prinsep

James Prinsep, a British scholar and officer of the East India Company, deciphered the Brahmi script in **1837**. This breakthrough allowed historians to read Ashokan edicts for the first time. Alexander Cunningham founded the Archaeological Survey of India (1861). John

Marshall directed excavations at Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro. Mortimer Wheeler re-excavated Harappa and proposed the Aryan Invasion theory.

Q5. The National Emblem of India (Lion Capital) was originally located at which site? PYQ Type

(A) Sanchi (B) Pataliputra (C) Bodh Gaya (D) Sarnath

✓ Answer: (D) Sarnath

The **Lion Capital of Sarnath** (Varanasi, UP) is the source of India's National Emblem. It features four Asiatic lions standing back-to-back on an abacus with a *dharma chakra* (wheel of law), a horse, a bull, an elephant, and a lion. It was erected by Ashoka to mark the site of Buddha's first sermon. The Dharma Chakra from this capital inspired the wheel in the Indian National Flag.

Q6. The 4th Buddhist Council, which resulted in the split of Buddhism into Hinayana and Mahayana, was held under which ruler? ⚠ Tricky

(A) Ashoka (B) Chandragupta II (C) Harsha (D) Kanishka

✓ Answer: (D) Kanishka

Tricky — very commonly confused with Ashoka! The 4th Buddhist Council was held at Kundalvana in Kashmir (~72 CE) under **Kanishka** of the Kushana dynasty. This is when Buddhism formally split into *Hinayana* (Theravada — conservative, original teachings, Pali language) and *Mahayana* (liberal, Sanskrit, idol worship, Buddha as god). Ashoka presided over the **3rd Council** at Pataliputra where Abhidhamma Pitaka was compiled.

Q7. Chandragupta Maurya's adviser Chanakya is also known by which other name/names? ⚠ Tricky

(A) Kautilya only (B) Vishnugupta only (C) Both Kautilya and Vishnugupta

(D) Megasthenes

✓ Answer: (C) Both Kautilya and Vishnugupta

Chanakya is known by **three names**: *Chanakya* (by gotra/family), *Kautilya* (by his pen-name in Arthashastra), and *Vishnugupta* (his personal name). He was a professor at Taxila University. **Megasthenes** was the Greek ambassador — a completely different person sent by Seleucus Nicator to Pataliputra. This is a common source of confusion in competitive exams.

Q8. Consider the following — Which one is NOT a feature of Mahayana Buddhism? ⚠ Tricky

(A) Belief in Bodhisattvas (B) Use of Sanskrit language

(C) Strict adherence to original Pali texts (D) Idol worship of Buddha

✓ Answer: (C) Strict adherence to original Pali texts

Strict adherence to Pali texts is a feature of **Hinayana (Theravada)** Buddhism, NOT Mahayana. Hinayana: conservative, Pali language, personal salvation (Arhat ideal), no idol worship, adheres to original teachings. Mahayana: liberal reforms, Sanskrit language, Bodhisattva ideal (helping others attain nirvana), idol worship of Buddha, spread to East Asia. Mahayana = "Greater Vehicle"; Hinayana = "Lesser Vehicle" (Mahayanists coined the term).

📋 Quick Reference — Exam Booster

☸ Buddhism — Must Know

- Buddha's birth: Lumbini (Nepal)
- Enlightenment: Bodh Gaya (Peepal tree)
- First sermon: Sarnath (Deer Park)
- Death: Kushinagar (UP)
- Pali = language of Tripitaka
- Three Jewels: Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha

⚖️ Jainism — Must Know

- Mahavira born: Vaishali, Bihar
- Enlightenment: Jrimbhikagrama
- Death: Pavapuri, Bihar
- 5th vow added by Mahavira: Brahmacharya
- 1st Tirthankara: Rishabhadeva/Adinath
- Language: Ardha-Magadhi Prakrit

🏛 Mauryan Admin

- Capital: Pataliputra (Patna, Bihar)
- Chanakya's book: Arthashastra
- Greek ambassador: Megasthenes (Indica)
- Saptanga theory: 7 elements of state
- Dhamma Mahamattas: special Dhamma officers
- Amatya: minister in Mauryan admin

⚠ Common Exam Traps

- 3rd Council = Ashoka (NOT 4th)
- 4th Council = Kanishka (NOT Ashoka)
- Mahavira added 5th vow (Parshvanatha had only 4)

📚 Hinayana vs Mahayana

- Hinayana: Pali, strict, Arhat ideal
- Mahayana: Sanskrit, liberal, Bodhisattva
- Mahayana: idol worship of Buddha
- Hinayana: no idol

📅 Key Dates

- Buddha born: ~563 BCE
- Mahavira born: ~599 BCE
- Mauryan Empire: 321–185 BCE
- Kalinga War: 261 BCE

- Chanakya = Kautilya = Vishnugupta
- Megasthenes ≠ Chanakya
- 13th MRE = Kalinga War (NOT 12th)

worship

- Split at 4th Council (Kanishka)
- Mahayana spread: China, Japan, Korea

- Brahmi deciphered: 1837 (Prinsep)
- Arthashastra rediscovered: 1905

📝 Mock Tests | 🎯 Subject Quiz | ✈️ Telegram

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