

GENERAL STUDIES II

Khajuraho Temples 2026: Complete UPSC Notes

Faculty/Author: Faculty Editorial Board

Date: 23 October 2026

Platform: Civil Service Gurukul Research Wing

Reading Time: 5 Mins

The Khajuraho Group of Monuments in Madhya Pradesh represents one of India's finest achievements in medieval temple architecture. Built primarily under the Chandela rulers between the 10th and 11th centuries, these Hindu and Jain temples are celebrated for their soaring Nagara-style shikharas, intricate sanctuaries, sculptures and sophisticated architectural planning. Recent attention to the proposed restoration of a Vishnu idol at Javari Temple highlights the importance of archaeological conservation. This article explores Khajuraho's history, architecture, religious symbolism, UNESCO recognition, heritage management and UPSC examination relevance, including original Prelims questions and a Mains practice answer.

Civil Service Gurukul

Learn • Analyse • Succeed

UPSC Prelims | Mains | Current Affairs

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS | 23 OCTOBER 2026 | ART & CULTURE

Complete UPSC notes on the Khajuraho Group of Monuments, Chandela rulers, architectural symbolism, UNESCO recognition and conservation of India's medieval heritage.

Civil Service Gurukul Editorial Team | Published: 23 October 2026

GS Paper I

Indian Art & Culture

Prelims + Mains

UNESCO Heritage

The Khajuraho Group of Monuments in Madhya Pradesh is among India's most remarkable achievements in medieval temple architecture. Built largely under the Chandela dynasty, these temples combine complex architectural planning with refined sandstone sculpture. The proposed restoration of a damaged Vishnu idol at Javari Temple has renewed attention to their historical importance and the scientific conservation of India's

cultural heritage.

1. Why Are Khajuraho Temples in the News?

The Archaeological Survey of India has announced plans to restore a headless sandstone image of Lord Vishnu at the Javari Temple in Khajuraho.

The proposal involves reattaching a long-separated head reportedly identified in an ASI repository.

The development raises questions about historical authenticity, structural compatibility, documentation and the appropriate limits of archaeological restoration.

UPSC Relevance: The development links current affairs with medieval history, Nagara architecture, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and archaeological conservation. The restoration is a proposal as of 23 October 2026, not a completed intervention.

2. Khajuraho: Important Facts

950–1050

Principal Construction Period (CE)

1986

UNESCO World Heritage Inscription

Chandela

Principal Patron Dynasty

Feature	Details
Location	Khajuraho, Chhatarpur district, Madhya Pradesh
Region	Bundelkhand, near the Vindhyan landscape
Patron Dynasty	Chandela dynasty
Architectural Style	Nagara style of North Indian temple architecture
Principal Material	Sandstone

Feature	Details
Religious Traditions	Shaivism, Vaishnavism and Jainism
UNESCO Recognition	1986, criteria (i) and (iii)
Conservation Authority	Archaeological Survey of India

3. Historical Background: The Chandela Dynasty

The Chandelas emerged as an important ruling power in central India during the early medieval period.

Their political and cultural influence was concentrated in the Jejakabhukti region, broadly corresponding to parts of modern Bundelkhand.

The rulers patronised temple construction, religious institutions and sophisticated sculptural traditions.

Important Chandela Rulers

- **Yashovarman:** Associated with the Lakshmana Temple, an important early monument at Khajuraho.
- **Dhanga:** Associated with the consolidation of Chandela power and significant temple patronage.
- **Vidyadhar:** Often associated with the period of the Kandariya Mahadeva Temple.

Khajuraho's architectural development reflected both political prestige and religious patronage.

4. What Is Nagara Temple Architecture?

Nagara is a major tradition of North Indian temple architecture.

Its most recognisable feature is the tower, or shikhara, rising above the sanctum.

Key Architectural Elements

Garbhagriha

The innermost sacred chamber housing the principal deity. It forms the ritual centre of the temple.

Shikhara

The towering structure above the sanctum, often curvilinear in Nagara architecture.

Mandapa

A pillared hall used for gathering, worship and movement towards the sanctuary.

Jagati

A raised platform that elevates the temple and may provide space for circumambulation.

Antarala

A transitional vestibule connecting the sanctum with the mandapa.

Urushringa

Subsidiary spire-like elements clustered around the main shikhara, enhancing its vertical effect.

5. Architectural Excellence of Khajuraho

A. Vertical Composition

The clustered spires create a dramatic upward movement, frequently interpreted as a symbolic representation of sacred mountains.

B. Integrated Temple Planning

Many temples organise their spaces along a clear axial sequence, leading from entrance and halls to the central sanctuary.

C. Sandstone Craftsmanship

Fine-grained sandstone allowed artisans to produce elaborate architectural ornament and detailed figures.

D. Sculptural Rhythm

Figures, decorative bands, niches and projections are arranged to create a balanced relationship between structure and ornament.

6. Important Temples at Khajuraho

Temple	Distinctive Feature
Kandariya Mahadeva	Monumental Shiva temple, celebrated for its soaring clustered shikharas.
Lakshmana Temple	Vaishnava temple associated with Yashovarman and a Panchayatana plan.
Vishvanatha Temple	Shaiva temple illustrating mature Chandela architecture.
Javari Temple	Eastern Group Vaishnava temple, noted for its elegant proportions and ornamental entrance.
Parshvanatha Temple	Important Jain monument with refined sculptural decoration.
Chaturbhuja Temple	Southern Group temple containing a large image of Vishnu.

7. Javari Temple: Why Is It Important?

Javari Temple belongs to the Eastern Group of Khajuraho monuments.

It is generally dated to the late 10th or early 11th century CE.

The temple is associated with the Vaishnava tradition and is notable for its elegant entrance, sculptural decoration and Nagara architectural form.

The Vishnu Idol Restoration Proposal

The recent proposal to reattach a recovered head to a damaged Vishnu image highlights the complexities of restoring historic sculptures.

Before any intervention, conservation specialists must examine the provenance, material compatibility and physical condition of the fragments.

The intervention should also be carefully documented to distinguish original material from modern repairs.

8. Understanding Panchayatana Architecture

Panchayatana is a temple layout in which a principal shrine is accompanied by four subsidiary shrines, typically positioned near the corners of a shared platform.

The arrangement is associated with several Indian temple traditions and is clearly illustrated by important Khajuraho monuments.

Prelims Tip: Do not confuse Panchayatana, an architectural arrangement, with Panchayati Raj, the system of rural local self-government.

9. Religious and Cultural Significance

Khajuraho includes temples associated with Hindu and Jain religious traditions.

Its sacred landscape demonstrates the coexistence of multiple forms of religious patronage under the Chandela rulers.

Interpretation of Sculptures

The sculptural programme includes deities, celestial beings, musicians, dancers, animals, everyday activities and mithuna figures.

Although erotic sculptures attract considerable attention, they form only one aspect of a much broader artistic and religious tradition.

The monuments should therefore be studied through architecture, religious symbolism, social history and craftsmanship rather than a single sculptural theme.

10. UNESCO World Heritage Recognition

The Khajuraho Group of Monuments was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1986.

Its inscription recognises exceptional artistic achievement and the cultural significance of its temple architecture.

UNESCO Criteria

- **Criterion (i):** Represents a masterpiece of human creative genius.
- **Criterion (iii):** Bears exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or civilisation.

11. Role of the Archaeological Survey of India

The Archaeological Survey of India is the principal central agency responsible for archaeological research and conservation of centrally protected monuments.

It functions under the Ministry of Culture.

The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, provides an important legal framework for protection of monuments of national importance.

Conservation Responsibilities

- Structural preservation.
- Documentation and archaeological research.
- Protection against damage and encroachment.
- Scientific conservation of sculptures.
- Visitor management and heritage awareness.

12. Challenges in Heritage Conservation

Challenge	Impact
Weathering	Rainfall, moisture, and temperature variations gradually damage exposed stone.
Tourism Pressure	Heavy footfall can increase wear and create management challenges.
Inappropriate Restoration	Unsuitable materials or speculative reconstruction can compromise authenticity.
Environmental Stress	Pollution, biological growth and changing climate conditions can affect monuments.
Documentation gaps	Incomplete historical records complicate accurate conservation decisions.

13. Principles of Scientific Restoration

Restoration should prioritise authenticity, material compatibility and minimal intervention.

Recommended Approach

1. Establish the provenance of the recovered fragment.
2. Conduct detailed photographic and scientific documentation.
3. Examine sandstone composition and fracture surfaces.
4. Assess structural stability before reattachment.
5. Use conservation methods that minimise damage to original material.
6. Document modern interventions transparently.
7. Provide periodic monitoring after conservation.

The aim should be to preserve historic evidence rather than create an imagined appearance of the past.

14. UPSC Prelims Quick Revision

- Khajuraho is located in Madhya Pradesh.
- Its principal patron dynasty was the Chandela dynasty.
- The major temples date largely to the 10th–11th centuries CE.
- Khajuraho is associated with Nagara temple architecture.
- The UNESCO inscription year is 1986.
- The site is recognised under criteria (i) and (iii).
- Kandariya Mahadeva Temple is dedicated to Shiva.
- Lakshmana Temple is associated with Vishnu.
- Javari Temple belongs to the Eastern Group.
- Garbhagriha is the inner sanctum.
- Shikhara refers to the tower above the sanctum.
- Panchayatana refers to a central shrine with four subsidiary shrines.

15. Original UPSC Prelims Practice Questions

Question 1. With reference to Khajuraho, consider the following statements:

1. The temples were built primarily under the Chandela dynasty.
2. They represent the Nagara architectural tradition.
3. They were inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1986.

Which statements are correct?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3.

All three statements are correct. Khajuraho represents Chandela-era Nagara architecture and received UNESCO recognition in 1986.

Question 2. In Indian temple architecture, the term "Urushringa" refers to:

- (a) A ritual water tank
- (b) A subsidiary spire surrounding a main shikhara
- (c) A gateway tower in a temple enclosure
- (d) A hall used exclusively for royal coronations

Answer: (b).

Urushringas are smaller spire-like elements associated with the main temple tower, creating the clustered vertical composition seen at Khajuraho.

Question 3. Consider the following pairs:

1. Kandariya Mahadeva — Shiva
2. Lakshminatha Temple — Vishnu
3. Parsvanatha Temple — Jain tradition

Which pairs are correctly matched?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 1 and 2 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (d) 1, 2 and 3.

All three pairs are correctly matched. They demonstrate the religious diversity of Khajuraho's architectural landscape.

16. UPSC Mains Practice Question

GS Paper I | 15 Marks | 250 Words

"Khajuraho's temples represent not merely religious monuments, but an extraordinary synthesis of artistic imagination, architectural engineering and cultural history." Discuss with reference to Nagara architecture and contemporary heritage conservation challenges.

Model Answer Framework

Introduction

The Khajuraho Group of Monuments, developed under the Chandela rulers, represents a major achievement of medieval Indian temple architecture.

Architectural Significance

- Curvilinear Nagara shikhara.
- Integrated sanctum and mandapa arrangements.
- Elaborate sandstone carving.
- Symbolic mountain-like vertical composition.

Cultural Significance

- Shaiva, Vaishnava and Jain traditions.
- Depictions of social and cultural life.
- Royal patronage and artistic specialisation.
- UNESCO recognition of outstanding cultural value.

Conservation Challenges

- Environmental weathering.
- Tourism-related pressures.
- Risks of speculative restoration.
- Need for scientific documentation.

Conclusion

Khajuraho's preservation requires an integrated approach combining archaeological expertise, scientific conservation, community participation and sustainable tourism.

17. Frequently Asked Questions

Which dynasty constructed the Khajuraho temples?

The temples were constructed mainly under the Chandela dynasty between the 10th and 11th centuries CE.

Which architectural style is found at Khajuraho?

The temples are outstanding examples of the Nagara style of North Indian temple architecture.

When did Khajuraho receive UNESCO recognition?

The Khajuraho Group of Monuments was inscribed in 1986.

Where is Javari Temple situated?

It is located in the Eastern Group of Khajuraho temples in Madhya Pradesh.

Why is Khajuraho important for UPSC?

It connects the Chandela dynasty, medieval architecture, religious art, UNESCO heritage and archaeological conservation.

18. Conclusion

The Khajuraho temples demonstrate the remarkable artistic and engineering capabilities of medieval India.

Their Nagara architecture, intricate sculptures and religious diversity offer valuable insights into Chandela-era society and cultural patronage.

The proposed Javari Temple restoration also reminds us that heritage conservation must balance public interest with historical authenticity and scientific responsibility.

For UPSC aspirants, Khajuraho provides an important case study linking history, art and culture, architecture and contemporary conservation.

I

UPSC Prelims • Mains • Current Affairs • Answer Writing

Prepare with conceptual notes, current affairs analysis, original MCQs and structured Mains answer-writing practice.

Explore UPSC Resources**Contact Our Team****Website:** www.civilservicegurukul.com**Mobile:** +91 9911020626**Email:** info@civilservicegurukul.com

Educational Disclaimer: This is independently written UPSC educational content reflecting information available as of 23 October 2026. The Javari Temple restoration is described as proposed, and its final status should be verified through official announcements.

Learn • Analyse • Succeed

UPSC Prelims | Mains | Current Affairs

Civil Service Gurukul

CIVIL SERVICE GURUKUL

UPSC Preparation • Current Affairs • Mentorship • Test Series

Website: www.civilservicegurukul.com • Email: info@civilservicegurukul.com • Mobile: +91 9911020626