



Mains Practice Question

Q. Examine the significance of pillars in Mauryan architecture. (150 words)

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Approach

- Start with usage of pillars in the past in architecture.
- Bring out the uniqueness of Mauryan pillars
- Highlight utility, craftsmanship of Mauryan pillars.

Introduction

Though the tradition of constructing pillars is very old and it may be observed that erection of pillars was prevalent in the Achaemenid empire as well. But the Mauryan pillars are different from the Achaemenian pillars:

Body

- The Mauryan pillars are rock-cut pillars thus displaying the carver's skills, whereas the Achaemenian pillars are constructed in pieces by a mason.
- The top portion of the pillar was carved with capital figures like the bull, the lion, elephant, etc. All the capital figures are vigorous and carved standing on a square or circular abacus. Abacuses are decorated with stylised lotuses.
- Example is Lion Capital of Sarnath which is also our national emblem. It is carved with considerable care—voluminous roaring lion figures firmly standing on a circular abacus which is carved with the figures of a horse, a bull, a lion and an elephant in vigorous movement, executed with precision, showing considerable mastery in the sculptural techniques. This pillar capital symbolising Dhammachakrapravartana (the first sermon by the Buddha) has become a standard symbol of this great historical event in the life of the Buddha.
- Stone Pillars showcased high technical skills in polishing which are shining as Northern Black Polished Ware. Each pillar is made of a single piece of sandstone. Presence of pillars throughout the country shows that such artistic knowledge travelled far and wide.
- These pillars were at many places linked to Buddhist philosophy as Ashoka used them for inscription of his message of Dhamma so that common people can know about it.

Conclusion

Thus, Mauryan Pillars showcased great achievements in artistic skills and creation as well as their utility in administering the kingdom.

