



80-Pillar Assembly Hall of Kumhrar and Mauryan Architecture

For Prelims: [Archaeological Survey of India](#), [Mauryan empire](#), [Emperor Ashoka](#), [Buddhism](#), [Central Ground Water Board](#), [Sanchi Stupa](#), Ajivika Sect

For Mains: Mauryan Empire and its Significance in Ancient India, Mauryan Architecture

[Source: IE](#)

Why in News?

The [Archaeological Survey of India \(ASI\)](#) has initiated efforts to uncover the remnants of an **80-pillar assembly hall at the Mauryan archaeological site of Kumhrar, Patna**.

- The initiative promises to rekindle global interest in the [Mauryan empire and its contributions to art and architecture](#).

What are the Key Facts About the 80-Pillar Assembly Hall of Kumhrar?

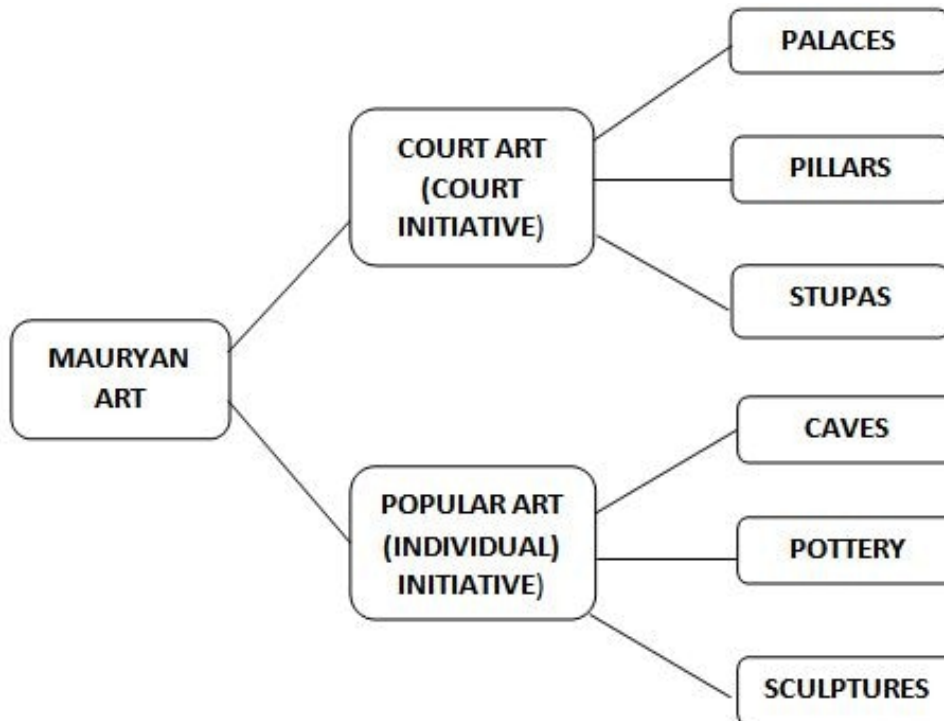
- **Historical Importance: 80-Pillar Assembly Hall of Kumhrar**, is linked to the **Mauryan empire (321-185 BCE)**, one of ancient India's greatest dynasties.
 - [Emperor Ashoka \(268-232 BCE\)](#) is believed to have convened the **3rd Buddhist Council** in this hall, aiming to unify the fragmented **Buddhist sangha and propagate Dhamma (Buddhist teachings)**.
 - This event was pivotal in shaping [Buddhism](#) as a global religion.
 - The site reaffirms **Pataliputra (Mauryan capital)** role as a **political and cultural hub of the Mauryan empire**.
- **Architectural Significance:** The hall featured 80 sandstone pillars supporting a wooden roof and floor.
 - Materials like sandstone and wood were transported via the [Sone-Ganga river route](#), showcasing advanced planning and resource management during the Mauryan period.
- **Archaeological Discoveries:**
 - **First Excavation (1912-1915):** Discovered one intact pillar, 80 pits marking the placement of other pillars, and stone fragments.
 - Evidence of thick ash layers suggested destruction by fire, potentially during the **Indo-Greek invasion or later Huna invasions**
 - **Second Excavation (1961-1965):** unearthed four additional pillars.
- **Preservation Challenges:** Rising water levels led to partial submergence of the site, prompting the **ASI to cover it with soil in 2004-2005 as a conservation measure**.
- **Reopening of the Assembly Hall:** The ASI is uncovering the site due to a receded water table in Patna and rising interest in Mauryan heritage.
 - Initially, 6-7 pillars will be exposed to study humidity and groundwater impacts, with

- support from the [Central Ground Water Board](#).
- An expert committee will later decide on fully reopening the 80 pillars, balancing preservation with public access.

What are the Key Highlights of the Mauryan Art and Architecture?

- **Architectural Types:** Mauryan architecture is categorized into **Court Art** (designed for political and religious purposes) and **Popular Art** (widely accessible and influenced by local traditions).

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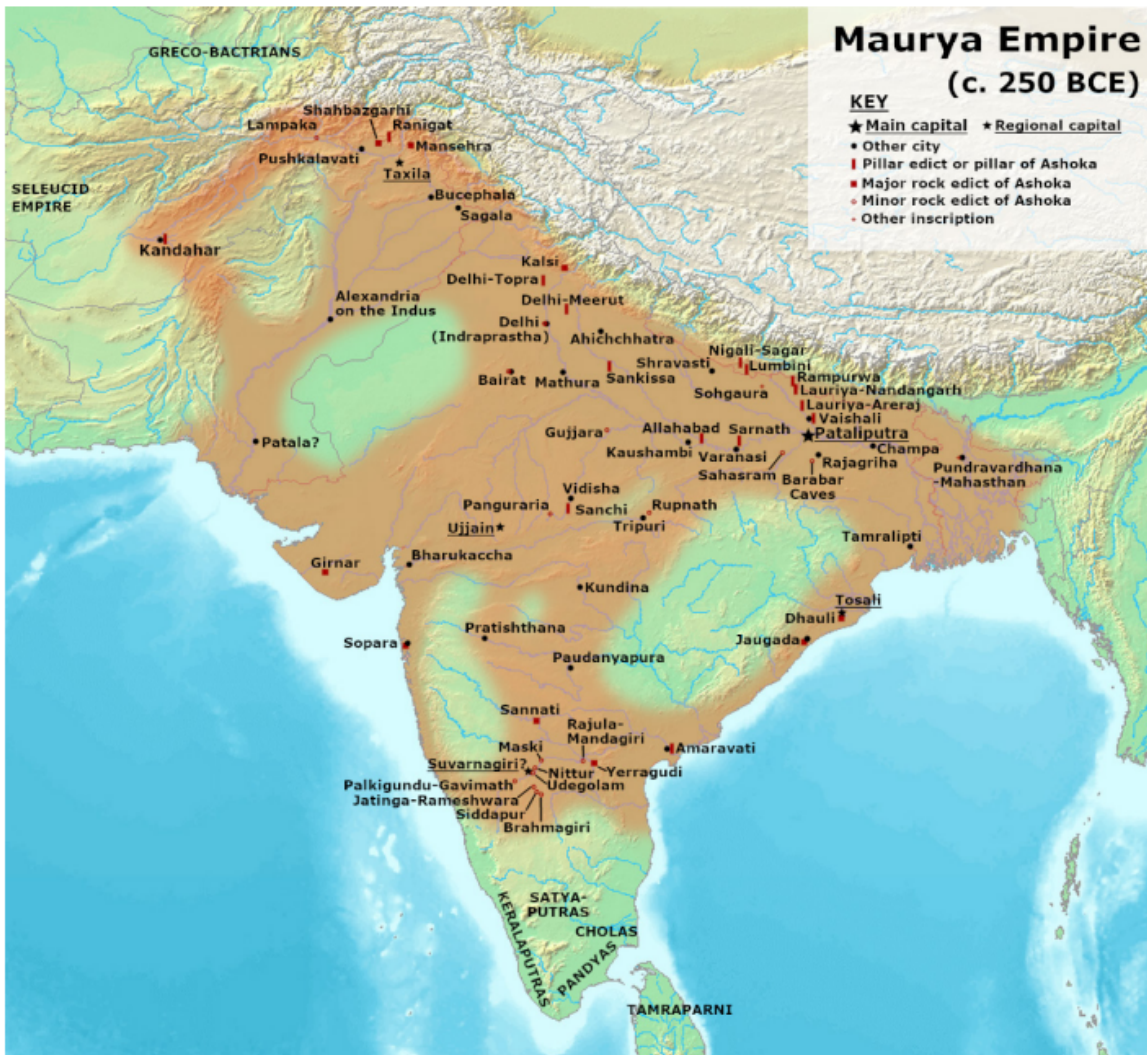


- **Mauryan Court Art:**
 - **Palace:** Greek historian **Megasthenes** praised the palaces of the Mauryan Empire as remarkable creations, with **Chinese traveler Fa Hien** calling them god-gifted monuments.
 - The palace of Chandragupta Maurya was influenced by **Achaemenid palaces at Persepolis (capital of the Achaemenid Empire)**.
 - Wood was the primary material used in construction.
 - **Examples:** Ashoka's palace at Kumrahar, and Chandragupta's palace.
 - **Pillars:** Mauryan pillars are tall, free-standing, monolithic, and made of sandstone quarried at Chunar.
 - They feature a lustrous polish and were influenced by **Achaemenian pillars**.
 - While Mauryan pillars are rock-cut, showcasing the carver's skills, **Achaemenian pillars were constructed in pieces**.
 - Ashoka's pillars, found across north India, often feature capitals with animal figures like lions and bulls, symbolizing the state.
 - They were erected to disseminate Buddhist teachings and court orders, with inscriptions in **Pali, Prakrit, Greek, and Aramaic**.
 - The structure of Mauryan pillars consists of four parts: a **monolithic shaft, a lotus- or bell-shaped capital, an abacus, and a capital figure**.
 - Similarities with Achaemenian pillars include **polished stones and motifs like the lotus**, as well as the practice of inscribing proclamations.
 - **Stupa:** Typically, stupas feature a **cylindrical drum, a hemispherical mound (anda), a harmika (square railing), and a chhatra (Central pillar supporting a triple umbrella form)** representing Buddhist principles.
 - The stupa's core was unburnt brick, while the outer surface used burnt bricks, covered with plaster, and decorated with wooden sculptures.

- **Sanchi Stupa (Madhya Pradesh)**, most famous Ashokan stupa. **Piprahwa Stupa (Uttar Pradesh) oldest.**
 - **Other stupas post-Buddha's death:** Rajagriha, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Vethapida, Pava, Kushinagar, Pippalivana.
- **Mauryan Popular Art:**
 - **Cave Architecture:** During the Mauryan period, caves were used as **viharas by Jain and Buddhist monks**. They were characterized by highly polished interiors and decorative gateways.
 - **Example: Barabar Caves** (4 caves) in Bihar, created by Ashoka for the **Ajivika Sect** (founded by Goshala Maskariputra, emphasized that the universe was governed by **niyati (destiny)**).
 - **Sculptures:** Yaksha and Yakshi sculptures were worshipped across Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.
 - **Examples: Lohanipur Yaksha** (torso of the nude male figure), and **Didargunj Yakshi**, Patna
 - **Pottery:** Known as **Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)**, Mauryan pottery had black paint and a lustrous finish, often used for luxury items.

Mauryan Dynasty

- **Chandragupta Maurya (321-297 BCE):** The **founder of the Mauryan Empire**, overthrew the **Nanda dynasty** and expanded the empire by annexing regions such as the **Hindu Kush**.
 - In 305–303 BCE, he formed a treaty with **Seleucus Nicator**, gaining additional territories. Later in life, **Chandragupta became a disciple of Jainism**.
 - **Chanakya**, the prime minister under the reign of Chandragupta Maurya (322 BCE - 297 BCE) and his successor Bindusara. Chanakya played a significant role in the empire's success.
- **Bindusara (298-272 BCE):** Expanded the empire to the Deccan, known as "**Amitraghata**" (**slayer of enemies**). Adopted the **Ajivika sect**. **Deimachus** was a Greek ambassador at his court.
- **Ashoka (272-232 BCE):** After the **Kalinga War**, which led to massive casualties, he embraced **Buddhism** and promoted peace through his **Dhamma (moral laws)**. Organized the 3rd Buddhist Council and spread Buddhism globally.
- **Dasharatha (232-224 BCE):** Last Mauryan ruler to issue imperial inscriptions. Faced territorial losses.
- **Samprati (224-215 BCE):** Re-established Mauryan control over disintegrated territories and promoted Jainism.
- **Shalishuka (215-202 BCE):** Known as a quarrelsome ruler with a negative reputation.
- **Devavarman (202-195 BCE):** Brief reign, mentioned in the Puranas.
- **Shatadhanvan (195-187 BCE):** Lost territories due to external invasions.
- **Brihadratha (187-185 BCE):** The last Mauryan emperor, assassinated by **Pushyamitra Shunga**, marking the end of the Mauryan dynasty.



Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)

- The ASI, under the Union Ministry of Culture, **protects and maintains monuments and archaeological sites of national importance** under the relevant provisions of the **Ancient Monuments Preservation Act, 1904 and The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958 (AMASR Act)**.
 - ASI conducts surveys, excavations, and conservation of archaeological sites and protected monuments.
 - ASI was founded in 1861 by **Alexander Cunningham- the first Director-General of ASI**. He is considered as the **“Father of Indian Archaeology”**.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the contributions of Mauryan architecture to India’s cultural heritage.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims

Q. Who among the following rulers advised his subjects through this inscription?

“Whosoever praises his religious sect or blames other sects out of excessive devotion to his own sect, with the view of glorifying his own sect, he rather injures his own sect very severely.” (2020)

- (a) Ashoka
- (b) Samudragupta
- (c) Harshavardhana
- (d) Krishanadeva Raya

Ans: (a)

Q: In which of the following relief sculpture inscriptions is 'Ranyo Ashoka' (King Ashoka) mentioned along with the stone portrait of Ashoka? (2019)

- (a) Kanganahalli
- (b) Sanchi
- (c) Shahbazagrhi
- (d) Sohgaura

Ans: (a)

Q: Who of the following had first deciphered the edicts of Emperor Ashoka? (2016)

- (a) Georg Buhler
- (b) James Prinsep
- (c) Max Muller
- (d) William Jones

Ans: (b)