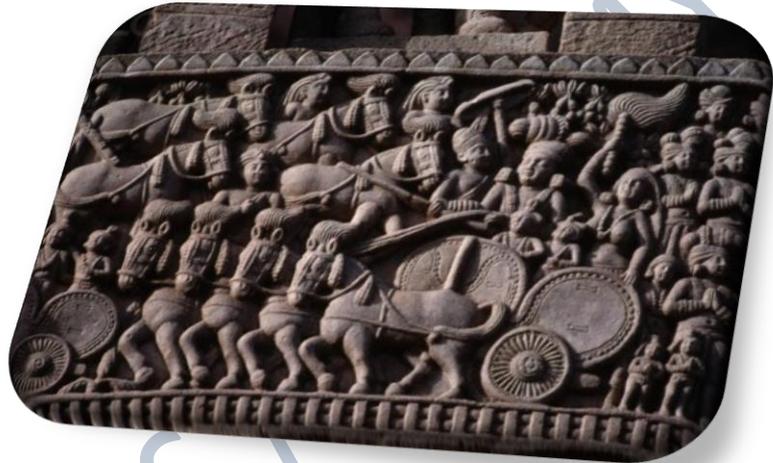


## Art and Culture: 'Art' during the Mauryan times.

### GS Paper 1: Indian heritage and culture – Indian culture covers the salient features of literature, art forms and architecture from ancient to modern times.

By the fourth century BCE the Mauryas established their power and by the third century BCE, a large part of India was under Mauryan control. Ashoka emerged as the most powerful king of the Mauryan dynasty who patronised the shraman tradition in the third century BCE. Religious practices had many dimensions and were not confined to just one particular mode of worship.



### Pillars, Sculptures and Rock-cut Architecture

Construction of stupas and viharas as part of monastic establishments became part of the Buddhist tradition. However, in this period, apart from stupas and viharas, stone pillars, rock-cut caves and monumental figure sculptures were carved at several places. All the capital figures are vigorous and carved standing on a square or circular abacus.

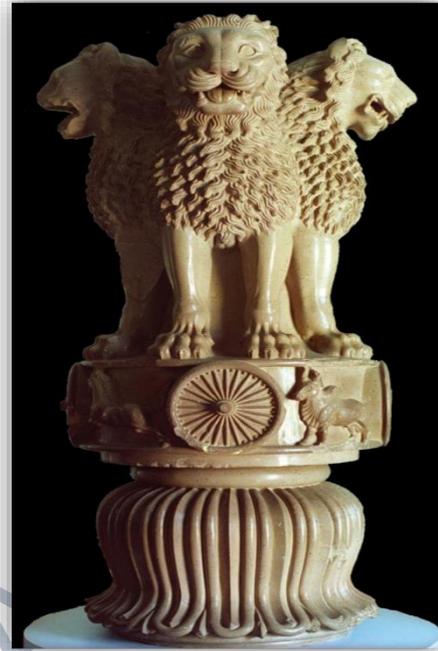
### Mauryan pillars and the Lion Capital

Some of the existing pillars with capital figures were found at Basarah-Bakhira, Lauriya-Nandangarh, Rampurva, Sankisa and Saranath.

The Mauryan pillar capital found at Sarnath popularly known as the Lion Capital is the finest example of Mauryan sculptural tradition. It 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.

The capital originally consisted of five component parts: (i) the shaft (which is broken in many parts now) (ii) a lotus bell base (iii) a drum on the bell base with four animals proceeding clockwise (iv) the figures of four majestic adorned lions and (v) the crowning element, Dharamchakra, a large wheel, was also a part of this pillar. However, this wheel is lying in a broken condition and is displayed in the site museum at Sarnath. The capital without the crowning wheel and the lotus base has been adopted as the National Emblem of Independent India.



The weight of the body of each lion is firmly shown by the stretched muscles of the feet. The abacus has the depiction of a chakra (wheel) having twenty-four spokes in all the four directions and a bull, a horse, an elephant and a lion between every chakra is finely carved. The motif of the chakra becomes significant as a representation of the Dharmachakra in the entire Buddhist art.



### Statues of Yakshas and Yakhinis

Monumental images of Yaksha, Yakhinis and animals, pillar columns with capital figures, rock-cut caves belonging to the third century BCE have been found in different parts of India. It shows the popularity of Yaksha worship and how it became part of figure representation in Buddhist and Jaina religious monuments. Large statues of Yakshas and Yakhinis are found at many places like Patna, Vidisha and Mathura. These monumental images are mostly in the standing position. One of the distinguishing elements in all these images is their polished surface. The depiction of faces is in full round with pronounced cheeks and physiognomic detail. One of

the finest examples is a Yakshi figure from Didarganj, Patna, which is tall and well-built. It shows sensitivity towards depicting the human physique. The image has a polished surface.

## Influence of Buddhism and Jainism in Arts

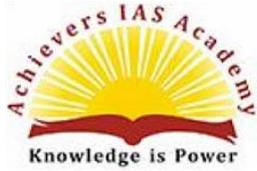
Stupas, Chaityas and Viharas

Due to the popularity of Buddhism and Jainism, stupas and viharas were constructed on a large scale. However, there are also examples of a few Brahmanical gods in the sculptural representations. It is important to note that the stupas were constructed over the relics of the Buddha at Rajagraha, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Allakappa, Ramagrama, Vethadipa, Pava, Kushinagar and Pippalvina.



SANCHI STUPA

Stupa, vihara and chaitya are part of Buddhist and Jaina monastic complexes but the largest number belongs to the Buddhist religion. One of the best examples of the structure of a stupa in the third century BCE is at Bairat in Rajasthan. It is a very grand stupa having a circular mound with a circumambulatory path. The great stupa at Sanchi (which will be discussed later) was built with bricks during the time of Ashoka and later it was covered with stone and many new additions were made.



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## Questions

1. Which were the four events in the life of the Buddha which have been depicted in different forms of Buddhist art? What did these events symbolise?
2. Construction of stupas and viharas as part of monastic establishments became part of the Buddhist tradition. Elaborate on the role of Buddhism in influencing the "Art" during the Mauryan period.

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