



## The Mauryan Art & Sculpture Represents a High Watermark In India's Tangible Cultural Heritage. Elucidate (150 words / 10 M) (GS-1 Ancient History & Culture)

### Approach:

- Introduction on Mauryan art.
- Description of Mauryan art & sculpture.
- Conclusion

The magnanimous Mauryan power is visible in its monumental stone sculptures and structures. The Mauryan art was **strongly linked to political & religious ideologies** of that time. Maurya kings, especially **Ashoka**, patronised different art forms like **stone sculptures, terracotta figurines and stupa architecture**.

### Arts & Sculpture:

- **Ashoka was a pioneer of stupa cult**. By redistributing **Buddhist relics** to important towns, he encouraged construction of stupas. He built approx. **84,000 stupas**. His greatest innovation was the **substitution of stone for wood & brick**.

**Sanchi stupa** is a **world heritage site**, known for **extensive carvings on its gateways**. The **pradakshipatha** around the stupa is covered with **Vedika**. **Buddha is shown symbolically** as empty throne, feet, etc. **Toranas** constructed in **all 4 directions** having stylistic differences. Each torana is decorated with **different themes** & consisting of **guardian images of Shalbhanjikas**. **Jatakas** form important part of stupa narratives.

- **Ashokan pillars at Rampurva, Lauriya Nandangarh and Sarnath** present excellent examples of stone sculptures – they are **circular & monolithic**, and made of **sandstone**. Ashokan pillars had some **Achaemenid/Persian influence**.

In Mauryan pillars, **base is absent** and **inverted bulging lotus** appears at the top of the shaft. Most Persian pillars have fluted surface while Mauryan pillars are **smooth**. The Mauryan type **circular abacus & independent animals** carved in round crowning are absent in Persian pillars. The **lion capital (Sarnath)** is adopted as **India's National emblem**.

- Among stone & terracotta sculptures, the **polished stone sculpture of Didarganj Yakshini** and a **polished Chunar sandstone sculpture of a male torso** at Patna, deserve special mention.
- A **stone portrait of Ashoka** at **Kanganahalli** is spectacular.
- **Beginnings of Rock-cut architecture** – **Lomash Rishi Cave** in the **Barabara hills near Gaya**, and the majestic **Dhauri caves** near Bhubaneswar, Odisha. The Dhauri caves contain a majestic rock sculpture of the **front part of an elephant**. **Lomash Rishi & Sudama caves** are examples of **wooden architectural**
- The famous **Vajrasana (throne of meditation)** at **Bodh Gaya's Mahabodhi temple**



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belonged to this period.

- A large number of **carved ring stones & disc stones**, having ritualistic significance, are found at various north Indian sites. They have two or more concentric circles and different geometric patterns.
- Prevalence of **Northern Black Polished Ware (NBPW)**, introduction of **burnt bricks & timers** in construction. **Megasthenes** reported wooden structure at Pataliputra.

Thus, the Mauryans made a remarkable contribution to the art & architectural heritage of India.

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