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Q11

Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2020 · GS I · 15 marks · Indian Heritage and Culture

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Core demand of the question

- Indian Philosophy and tradition played a significant role in conceiving and shaping the monuments and their art in India. Discuss
- Keep a 15-mark length

Revision summary

Vastu and the world-mountain idea shape the Hindu temple plan.

Buddhist stupas and **Ajanta** paintings turn anitya and karuna into circuit and mural.

Jain caves and agama sculpture follow liberation and rasa.

Sufi and Sikh buildings encode baraka and sewa in plan.

Philosophy programmes the monument; stone and patronage still constrain it.

Introduction

Indian monuments are not only engineering. They are philosophy in brick, stone, and plaster. Dharma, mandala, emptiness, rasa, and later Sufi and Sikh ideas decided plan, axis, and the story the wall was allowed to tell.

Body

Cosmology as plan

- Vedic and Puranic **vastu** and the temple as Mount Meru or Kailasa turn a shrine into a diagram of the universe. The garbhagriha is the cave-womb; the shikhara is the world mountain.
- Buddhist stupas at **Sanchi** and cave chaityas at **Ajanta** encode anitya and the path around the relic. Circumambulation is a philosophical walk, not a tourist circuit.
- Jain temples and Ellora's Jain caves stage the tirthankara as a liberated presence; the samavasarana idea shapes assembly and axis.

Narrative and image

- **Ajanta** Jataka walls teach karuna and the Bodhisattva ideal in colour. The monument is a sermon that illiterate pilgrims could read.
- Hindu temple sculpture at Khajuraho, Konark, and the Chola bronze tradition follows agama and rasa: the deity must be beautiful enough to receive puja, which is a philosophical aesthetics, not decoration.

- Pallava **Mahabalipuram** relief of the Descent of the Ganga is Puranic hydrology carved as public philosophy of kingship and grace.

Living traditions beyond the 'Hindu-Buddhist' frame

- Sufi dargahs organise space around baraka, the grave, and the langar-like courtyard; Indo-Islamic tombs still sit in charbagh paradises drawn from Persian and Quranic garden ideas meeting Indian craft.
- Sikh **Harmandir Sahib**'s lower plinth and four doors translate sewa and openness into architecture.
- Mosque qibla and the empty mihrab are a philosophical refusal of the idol, as binding for those monuments as the linga is for a Shaiva vimana.

Limits

- Patron taste, guild skill, and available stone also shape art. Philosophy is necessary, not a lone cause.
- Folk shrines often simplify the shastra; tradition here is practice, not only the Upanishad.

Flow diagram

Indian philosophy -> Vastu mandala temple
 Indian philosophy -> Stupa chaitya Ajanta
 Indian philosophy -> Sufi Sikh space
 Vastu mandala temple -> Monument and art
 Stupa chaitya Ajanta -> Monument and art
 Sufi Sikh space -> Monument and art

Conclusion

- **Indian monuments were conceived as walkable philosophy:** mandala temples, stupa paths, Jataka walls, and later dargah and gurdwara ethics. Tradition supplied the programme. Guilds and kings supplied the chisel.

Facts & figures

Sanchi stupa

Buddhist relic mound whose pradakshina path is a philosophical circuit.

Ajanta

Cave viharas whose Jataka murals preach as much as they decorate.

Mahabalipuram

Pallava relief that carves Puranic Ganga myth as royal-sacred landscape.

Kailasa Ellora

Monolithic Shaiva mountain-temple, philosophy of Kailasa made walkable.

Harmandir Sahib

Sikh shrine whose doors and tank translate equality and sewa into architecture.

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