

1. South Indian Temples are the most beautiful architectural expressions of religion in India. Comment.

दक्षिण भारतीय मंदिर भारत में धर्म के सबसे सुंदर वास्तुशिल्प अभिव्यक्ति हैं। टिप्पणी करें।

Demand of the question:

It expects students to write about the religious architectural expressions of south Indian temples.

Introduction:

Most of the art and architectural remains that survive from Ancient and Medieval India are religious in nature. Temples were decorated with the images of gods and mythical narration of Puranas which ultimately amalgamated divinity with art.

Body:

South Indian temple architecture:

- South Indian temple architecture is called as Dravidian style of temple architecture. The significance of the Dravidian style was the balance in position of sculptures on the temple walls and stone carvings. During the Pallava era, 'Vimana' (inner gopuram) dominated the architecture whereas in the Chola and Nayak periods it was the Gopuram (gateway tower).
- Dravidian architecture could be listed on the chronological basis with three phases — Pallava phase from 6 to 9 century, followed by Chola phase from 10 to 13 century and the later period as Vijayanagar and Nayak phase.

Architectural expression of religion:

- Influence of Buddhism: The rock cut temple of the Pallavas emulated the Buddhist architecture, where cutting down monolithic caves was common. The Mamallapuram shore temples (Mahabalipuram) consist of narrative panels with great aestheticism and execution. It was the first structural temple where the narratives were taken from both Saivism and Vaishnavism.
- Bhakti tradition: The early Chola temples were more advanced in terms of technology with a well-planned design and execution. Bhakti ideology as an idiom influenced temple iconography.
- Temples dedicated to Vishnu had many utsava murtis of his manifestations. He was represented with his consorts and as Krishna and Rama, his incarnations in human form.
- Use of Purana stories: The culmination of Dravidian style was in the Brihadeshwara and Gangaikonda Cholapuram temples. The walls surrounding the sanctum have extended mythological narratives which are depicted through painted murals and sculptures.
- The Pandyas continued the Dravidian style at Chidambaram and Kanchipuram. However, it was during the Vijayanagar Empire and Nayak period, the Brahmanical tradition of Sanskritism and agamas got incorporated.

- Bronze sculptures and Nataraja: Images were all made using mnemonic techniques, whereby the craftsmen were meant to memorise dhyana shlokas which describe the attributes of various goddesses and gods and they used the taalamana canon of measurement to essentially visualise the image and then sculpt it out of their own imagination rather than using models. They convey the spiritual fervour of the artists who made them.
- The numerous processional images of Siva present him in many forms. One can see him as a family man in the Somaskandha icon, with his beautiful wife Uma and child Skanda. As Bhikshatana, one can see Siva as the enchanting mendicant. As Veenadhara, one can see Siva as the lord of music. As Tripurantaka, Siva destroys the citadels of three demons. Many bronzes have also been made of Siva's consort Parvati and their sons, Ganapati and Kartikeya.

Beauty of the religious expression in architecture:

- These works of art are part of a divine architecture where the deity manifests in forms that awaken bliss and peace within the viewer. These fluid and subtle images were a means of expressing the beauty of the divine that is in all that one sees.
- The Chola artists imaged deities as graceful, languid beings. There is always a sense of repose. Minute details such as the gentle swelling of bellies bring these sculptures alive before one. It is not optical reality but the essence of living flesh that is captured in the art.
- Sculptures in south Indian temple architecture are also a mark of great technical achievement in the arts, where metal and stone was flawlessly moulded and carved respectively to give form to the intangible. The material never dominates the image, which moves the viewer through the perfection of its beauty.

Conclusion:

Temples depict the deities in human form in such a way that the divine is brought from abstraction to accessibility, and even intimacy. It takes devotee on journey towards knowledge and realisation of formless eternal.

2. The caves of ancient and medieval ages enlighten us with a lot of information of the bygone era giving us an impression of various traditions, customs and lifestyles followed by the inhabitants.

प्राचीन और मध्ययुगीन युग की गुफाएं हमें बीते युग की बहुत सी जानकारी से अवगत कराती हैं, जिससे हमें निवासियों द्वारा पालन की जाने वाली विभिन्न परंपराओं, रीति-रिवाजों और जीवन शैली का आभास होता है।

Demand of the question:

It expects students to write about the information derived through the caves of ancient and medieval times about the traditions, customs and lifestyles of cave inhabitants.

Introduction:

Ancient cave remains are a great witness to the evolution of human civilisation, through the numerous rock weapons, tools, ceramics and bones to sculptures, wall paintings and murals. More than anything else, caves both natural and manmade are the greatest wealth of our ancestors.

Body:

Prehistoric and early historic caves:

- Community living and elements of celebration: Bhimbetka caves gives information about the intimate contact of humans with surrounding animal life. Some hunting scenes show a fear of animals, but many others show a feeling of tenderness and love for them. Paintings of mundane events of daily life in those times to sacred and royal images. These include hunting, dancing, music, horse and elephant riders, animal fighting, honey collection, decoration of bodies, and other household scenes.
- Mesolithic period caves and painting gives idea of hunting details. The hunting scenes depict people hunting in groups, armed with barbed spears, pointed sticks, arrows and bows. In some paintings these primitive men are shown with traps and snares probably to catch animals.
- Cloths and ornaments: The hunters are shown wearing simple clothes and ornaments. Sometimes, men have been adorned with elaborate head-dresses. Women are painted both in the nude and clothed. The young and the old equally find place in these paintings. Children are painted running, jumping and playing.
- Depiction of women in household work and traces of family life: Women grinding and preparing food. Some of the pictures of men, women and children seem to depict a sort of family life.
- Places of religious importance: Some of the paintings were made in places which do not seem to have been living spaces at all. Perhaps these places had some religious importance.

Buddhist, Jain and Hindu caves of ancient and medieval period:

- Since Mauryan times, India entered era of manmade rock cut caves. Lomus rishi caves of 3rd century BCE exhibit Chaitya- prayer hall of Buddhists.
- Buddhist caves of Viharas and Chaityas included sculptures, paintings with frescos. Sculptures in the caves gives idea of religious traditions of those times. For examples, Hinayana Buddhist caves lacked sculpture of Buddha, whereas Mahayana caves have enormous sculpture of Buddha.

- Caves on the trade routes give idea of economic linkages of caves to the traders, who used to give donations to the monasteries of Buddhists, Jains or Hindus. For example density of caves in the western ghat is quite high.
- Painting of the caves depicts stories from the Jatakas, which are based on previous births of Buddha. Ajanta caves are the most elaborated cave complex significant for painting.
- Multiple religious caves in same cave complex like Ellora indicates tolerance of those times. Top down carving of monolithic Kailash temple of Ellora indicate high engineering skills of inhabitants.
- Cave temples of these times have vaishnavite and saivite influence. Mural painting in Badami caves have vaishnavite affiliations. Paintings in this cave depict palace scenes. One shows Kirtivarman, the son of Pulakesi I and the elder brother of Mangalesha, seated inside the palace with his wife and feudatories watching a dance scene.
- Presence of Chalukya queen in court indicates the position of royal women in early medieval times.

Conclusion:

These caves helped us to understand about inhabitants, their lifestyle, their food habits, their daily activities and, above all, they help us understand their mind, the way they thought. In the absence of script in prehistoric times and even during time of paucity of literary evidences, archaeological cave sites act as guide to the past.

3. The subject matter of Indian sculpture is almost invariably abstracted human forms that were used to instruct people in the truths of the Hindu, Buddhist, or Jain religions. Elucidate.

भारतीय मूर्तिकला की विषय वस्तु लगभग अपरिवर्तित मानव रूप है जो हिंदू, बौद्ध, या जैन धर्मों की सच्चाइयों में लोगों को निर्देश देने के लिए उपयोग की जाती थी। स्पष्ट करें।

Demand of the question:

It expects students to write about role played by Indian sculptures to express the ideas of prevailing religions of those times like Hinduism, Buddhism or Jainism.

Introduction:

The art of sculpture, the most highly respected medium for artists, was widely practised throughout the subcontinent, and buildings were profusely adorned with it. Indians right from the time of Indus valley civilisation used sculptures to express their ideas of truth.

Body:

Sculpting in India dates back to the Indus Valley civilization (2500-1800 BCE), when small items of bronze sculpture and terracotta sculpture were produced. Female terracotta sculpture perceived by archaeologist as Mother Goddess or Shakti gives ideas about possibility of matrilineal society or ideas of faith like belief in fertility goddess.

Buddhism:

- Jataka stories became part of stupa decoration in post mauryan phase. Depiction of showing Queen Mayadevi's dream; mother of Siddhartha Gautam indicates ideas of Buddhist symbolism used in sculpture.
- The empty seat was meant to indicate the meditation of the Buddha, and the stupa was meant to represent the mahaparinibbana. Another frequently used symbol was the wheel. This stood for the first sermon of the Buddha, delivered at Sarnath. As is obvious, such sculptures cannot be understood literally – for instance, the tree does not stand simply for a tree, but symbolises an event in the life of the Buddha.
- The shalabhanjika motif suggests that many people who turned to Buddhism enriched it with their own pre-Buddhist and even non-Buddhist beliefs, practices and ideas.
- Various schools of Buddhist sculpture emerged in India like Mathura school in which, abhayamudra of Buddha or depiction of bodhisattvas, in Gandhara school depiction of meditated peace and in Amravati school depiction of jataka tales propagate lessons of Buddhism.
- With the rise of Vajrayana Buddhism many Bodhisattva images were added as a part of the personified representations of certain virtues or qualities as propagated by the Buddhist religious principles for the welfare of the masses.

Hinduism:

- Vedic sanatan dharma under the influence of Buddhism adopted the art of sculpting. Sculptures of mainly Vishnu and his various forms and Shaiva mainly the lingas and mukhalingas found at Mathura.
- Mamallapuram sculpture of Varaha incarnation of Vishnu saving Bhudevi-mother earth indicates Hindu idea of incarnation.
- Nataraja sculpture identifies Shiva as god of destruction and ideas of cycle of life.
- Huge Nandi sculpture in Lepakshi temple or Brihadeeshawara temple highlight relationship of ardent devotee with Shiva.

Jainism:

- Sculptures of Jainism can clearly give idea about the streams of Jainism as it depicts fundamental differences between Shwetambara and Digambara
- Naked sculptures of teerthankars indicate Digambara stream of Jainism, lack of decoration in sculpting highlight ideas of extremity.
- Bahubali sculpture practicing meditation in 'Kayotsarg' posture in Shravanbelagola.

- In Yogi Position sculpture of Buddha and Mahavir in Shwetambara stream may resemble similar yet the style of clothes indicate differences.

Conclusion:

Indian religious sculptures used abstracted human forms to express the ideas of various religions in their urge to popularise the truth among masses effectively. Art of sculpting made it possible to realise the ideas or truth of religions into tangible physical marvels.

