Art & Culture · GS - I

Discuss the significance of the lion and bull figures in Indian mythology, art and architecture.

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2022	GS - I	Art & Culture

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
15	~250 words

Answer Hint

The lion and bull possess religious, political and artistic significance in Indian civilisation. The lion represents power, courage, royal authority and Buddhist symbolism, while the bull is associated with fertility, strength, agricultural life and Lord Shiva. Their representations in sculpture, temples and monuments reflect evolving religious traditions and cultural values.

Model Answer

Introduction

The lion and bull are prominent motifs in Indian mythology, art and architecture. Their symbolic meanings span religious traditions, royal power, moral values and everyday economic life.

Body

Significance of the Lion

1. Hindu Mythology: The lion is associated with Goddess Durga, whose mount symbolises courage and the triumph of good over evil. Narasimha, an avatar of Vishnu, represents divine protection and the destruction of injustice.

2. Buddhist Tradition: The lion symbolises the Buddha’s authority and teachings, often described metaphorically as the “lion’s roar.” Lion capitals and sculptures appear at important Buddhist sites.

3. Political Symbolism: Emperor Ashoka's Lion Capital at Sarnath represents authority, ethical governance and the spread of the Dhamma. Its adapted form is India's National Emblem.

4. Architecture: Lions frequently appear as guardians at temple entrances, symbolising protection and strength.

Significance of the Bull

1. Hindu Mythology: Nandi, the bull, is the sacred vehicle and devoted attendant of Lord Shiva. Bull figures commonly face the principal shrine in Shiva temples.

2. Fertility and Agriculture: The bull represents virility, productive power and the agrarian economy. Bull motifs on Indus Valley seals indicate the importance of cattle in early urban society.

3. Art and Architecture: The monumental Nandi at the Brihadisvara Temple and other Shiva temples illustrates the artistic and religious importance of the bull.

Conclusion

The lion and bull embody strength, protection, devotion and prosperity. Their enduring presence in Indian art and architecture reflects the continuity of religious beliefs and cultural symbolism across historical periods.

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