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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. A unique form of temple architecture developed on the Himalaya in northern Indian states. Elucidate. (150 Words)

19 Jul, 2021 GS Paper 1 Indian Heritage & Culture

Approach

- Give a brief about the main temple architectural styles of ancient India.
- Elucidate, by giving some examples, how the hill architecture was different from the other forms.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Most of the architectural remains that survive from Ancient and Medieval India are religious in nature. In different parts of the country, the distinct architectural style of temples was the result of geographical, ethnic and historical diversities.

- Two broad orders of temples in the country are known as **Nagara in the north and Dravida in the south.**
- At times, the Vesara style of temples is also found as an independent style, created through the selective mixing of the Nagara and Dravida orders.

Body

- **Gandhara Influence:** A unique form of architecture developed in the hills of Kumaon, Garhwal, Himachal and Kashmir. Kashmir's proximity to prominent Gandhara sites (such as Taxila, Peshawar and the northwest frontier) lent the region a strong Gandhara influence by the fifth century CE.
- **Influence of the Gupta and post-Gupta traditions** that were brought to it from Sarnath, Mathura and even centres in Gujarat and Bengal.

The images of **Mahishasuramardini and Narasimha at the Lakshna-Devi Mandir** are evidence of the influence of the post-Gupta tradition. Both the images show the influence of the metal sculpture tradition of Kashmir.

- The hills also had their **own tradition of wooden buildings with pitched roofs.** At several places in the hills, while the main garbhagriha and shikhara are made in a rekha-prasada or latina style, the mandapa is of an older form of wooden architecture.
- Sometimes, the temple itself takes on a **pagoda shape.**
- One of the most important temples is **Pandrethan**, built during the eighth and ninth centuries. In keeping with the tradition of a water tank attached to the shrine, this temple is **built on a plinth built in the middle of a tank.**

This temple is a Hindu one, possibly dedicated to Shiva. The architecture of this temple is in keeping with the age-old Kashmiri tradition of wooden buildings.

- Due to the snowy conditions in Kashmir, **the roof is peaked and slants slowly outward in hill temples.**

- The temple is moderately ornamented, moving away from the post-Gupta aesthetics of heavy carving.
- However, of the temples in Kumaon, the ones at Jageshwar in Almora, and Champavat near Pithoragarh, are classic examples of nagara architecture in the region.

Conclusion

Thus, both the Buddhist and Hindu traditions intermingled and spread in the hills and that led to a unique style of architecture.