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One of the most incredible creations of the ancient civilizations, the Ashoka Pillar is the reminiscence of the bygone times and the most incredible specimen of the ancient art. Its magnificence is amazing, and hardly anyone can explain how the people belonging to that era could create something of the kind. One of the greatest mysteries of the modern times, Ashoka Pillar can be compared to the Egyptian pyramids.

One of several columns, the Pillar of Sarnath is about fourteen feet tall, of cylinder shape, with four lions seated with their backs to each other at the top. Made of polished sandstone, the column is of yellowish sandy color with a slight tint of brown and gray. Regarding the durability of sandstone, it is miraculous that several columns have stood through centuries and are now the part of our modern world.

Although many columns have not survived the time test and crashed, the Ashoka Pillar of Sarnath is still as good as new, with just a few pieces of sandstone missing. One more thing which is well worth mentioning is the shape of the column. The rounded outline, the soft contour and the clear lines are something to admire. The ancient sculptors reached perfection, creating the symbol of Ashoka! The column depicting the four lions looks somewhat fragile, but this is the case of deceptive appearances. The smooth and milky surface makes one think of the most exquisite marble in the palaces of the ancient kings. One of the things which come into the open as one casts a look at the sculpture is the smoothness of the lines.

They curve like the waves of the sea, and there is not a single sharp broken line in the sculpture. Breathing with harmony, the curving lines create a

specific pattern for the entire sculpture to follow. Because of the smoothness of the lines in each part of the sculpture, it looks in the most harmonic way.

The column itself is shaped rather weirdly, with lots of curves and protruding parts. The platform where the four lions are seated has carvings which depict various animals and figures. It must be noted that the animals whose images are carved in the column are mostly domestic ones: a goat, a horse, etc. The lions themselves resemble their living prototypes a lot.

With their mouths open, it seems that they are going to jump off the column and run for some prey. It is quite peculiar that none of the lions' mouths is shaped in the same way; one of them is barely open, while another bares teeth completely. One can see the tongue of one of the lions clearly - perhaps, the animal is yawning. Another feature of the lions in the sculpture is their eyes. They are all wide open, which makes the animals look less realistic and more fairy-tale. Perhaps, designed to mean that these lions are always on the guard, the haunting eyes of these animals in the sculpture provide the strongest impression on the visitors.

Despite the fact that lions are one of the fiercest animals in the world, the ones in the Ashoka pillars cannot be defined as the blood-thirsty cannibals. These are rather the loyal guards of the city and its dwellers, the warriors that are always on the watch. It seems that these " watchlions" are supposed to be fair and just, and maybe even wise. Indeed, it takes much wisdom to decide whether the man entering the city deserves being trusted. Speaking of the entire artwork, one should say that it looks solid and somewhat chic. It breathes with richness and with the splendor of the

ancient kings with their amazing palaces and thousands of servants. A perfect reminiscence of the bygone times, this is a piece worth taking a look at. Because of the ancient history which accompanies the sculpture, its beauty, interwoven with the ancient legends, produces even more stunning effect.

Since the mystery about the column is still unraveled, it still attracts hundreds of people. The secrets which the lions conceal within are something to ponder over. Perhaps, one of the explanations of the mystery which the place is breathing with is the fact that the great Ashoka himself chose this place for his meditations[1].

This is one of the reasons for the Indians to cherish the sculptures so much. Embodying the symbol of the city, these columns are the part of the history which is so easily merging with legends in India, and in a couple of moments you will not be able to tell the real from the fable yourself. Bearing the piece of the Indian history, this column has a secret which the Indians themselves do not dare to unlock. Some scientists suppose and all the locals believe that Ashoka's edicts have been carved in the column as well[2]. Although this is merely guesswork, a single suggestion about such possibility makes the Indians tremble in awe for Ashoka and the mysterious column. As Kulke put it, References of this kind have often been used to show that Ashoka was running a highly centralized direct administration of this whole empire.

But the pillar inscriptions which contain these latter references have so far been found only in central Gangetic region and the Ganga-Yamuna Doab[3]. The cultural meaning of the column cannot be doubted. Worshipping the

legendary ruler of India, the people associate the column with this historic personality.

Embodying the very spirit of Buddhism, the pillar with the four lions at the top is filled with the sacral meaning for the Indian people; this might be one of those things which the people of the other cultures will never be able to conceive. Even without knowing the background story of the column, one will feel that it takes their breath away. Combined with the bright imagination work, the perfectly shaped sculpture makes various images appear in one's mind.

Although the use of the sandy palette looks quite justified, since it is natural for a lion to be of sandy-yellowish color, there is more than meets the eye in this color cast. Such choice can also be explained by the fact that the yellow color is the key color of Buddhism. Thus, the column and the lions embody not only the image of the city and its ancient ruler, but also the philosophy of the people living here. Such niceties are quite natural for the Indians, with their culture which considers aesthetic the beginning and the end of the world. Recognized even by the modern architects, the pillar is pure perfection: John Marshal and V. Smith have praised the engineering, design, fine decorative carving, polish of Ashoka stambha, the pillar.

People from all lifestyles are drawn towards the symbol of lotus, the dharma chakra and the four lions. The Ashoka pillar at Sarnath is the finest among all the pillars[4]. One of the most magnificent pieces of legendary ancient India, the Ashoka pillar is really worth seeing. Breathing with the secrets of the

Indian gods, this place is like a sanctuary for the Indians. The four lions keep their guard well.

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