

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Post-Mauryan Trends in Indian Art and Architecture

Introduction

- After the decline of the Mauryan Empire in the second century BC, various rulers controlled the regions which were once under the Mauryas, like the Shungas, Kanvas, Kushanas and Guptas in the north and central India; and the Satavahanas, Abhiras, Ikshvakus and Vakatakas in the south and western India.
- This period also saw the emergence of Brahmanical sects like the Shaivas and the Vaishnavas.
- Chief examples of fine sculpture are found at: Bharhut and Vidisha (Madhya Pradesh); Mathura (Uttar Pradesh); Bodhgaya (Bihar); Jaggayyapeta (Andhra Pradesh); Bhaja and Pavani (Maharashtra); and Khandagiri and Udaigiri (Odisha).

Post Mauryan Art and Architecture

Bharhut

- Sculptures are tall like the Yakshas and Yakshinis of the Mauryan era.
- Illusion of three-dimensionality is present.
- Narratives or stories are represented pictorially.
- Space is utilised to the maximum extent.
- Initially, the carvings were shown with flat images, i.e., projection of hands and feet were not possible, but later on they emerged with deep carvings and a much naturalised representation of human and animal forms.
- One important sculpture at Bharhut: Queen Mayadevi (the Buddha's mother) dreaming of an elephant descending towards her womb.
- Jataka tales are also seen.
- A common characteristic of all the male images after first and second centuries is the knotted headgear.

Mathura, Sarnath and Gandhara Schools

- Gandhara (in modern Pakistan), Mathura and Sarnath emerged as important art production centres from the first century AD onwards.
- Buddha gets a human form in Mathura and Gandhara. Previously he was represented via symbols.

- **Gandhara art form** had influence of Indo-Greek elements such as Bactria and Parthia traditions besides the local Gandhara tradition.
 - The Buddha images here have Hellenistic features.
 - The Buddha here is more muscular.
 - The sculptures are heavily polished with rich carvings.
 - The hair is curly and the lobes of the ears are elongated.
 - The garments are generally flowing in nature.
 - The sculptures were initially made of stone and later on stucco was also used.
- The **Mathura art tradition** became so strong that it spread to other parts of northern India.
 - Best example: Stupa sculpture at Sanghol, Punjab.
 - The Buddha images in the Mathura school are modelled on the earlier Yaksha images.
 - Mathura art form also has some images of the Shaiva and Vaishnava faiths but images of the Buddha are numerous.
 - There is less symbolism here as compared to the Gandhara School.
 - The sculptures are generally made of red sandstone.
 - The garments are clearly visible and they usually cover the left shoulder. Multiple folds are shown.
 - The halo around the deity is profusely decorated.
 - In the 2nd century, the images get fleshier and their rotundity increase.
 - In the 3rd century, the fleshiness is reduced. Movement is shown by increasing the distance between the legs and bending of the body. There is more softness in the surface.
 - But in the late 4th century, this trend is reversed and the flesh becomes tightened.
 - In the 5th and 6th centuries, the drapery is integrated into the mass.
- **Sarnath** and **Kosambi** also emerged as important centres of art besides the traditional centre Mathura.
 - The Buddha images in Sarnath have transparent drapery covering both shoulders.
 - The halo around the Buddha is hardly decorated.

Early temples

- Apart from Stupas, Brahmanical temples also started getting built.
- Temples were decorated with the images of gods and also representations of the Purana myths.
- Every temple had a principle image of a god.
- There were 3 kinds of shrines of the temples:
 - Sandhara type: without pradakshinapatha (circumambulatory path)
 - Nirandhara type: with pradakshinapatha
 - Sarvatobhadra: which can be accessed from all sides

- Important temple sites from this period: Deogarh (UP); Eran, Udaygiri, Nachna-Kuthara (near Vidisha in MP). These are simple structures with a veranda, a hall and the shrine at the back.

Buddhist Monuments of South India

- The Vengi region in Andhra Pradesh has many stupas, in Jaggayyapeta, Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda, Bhattiprolu, Goli, etc.
- **Amaravati School of Art**
 - Developed during the Satavahana period.
 - This is fully indigenous in nature and had profound influence on art in Sri Lanka and south-east Asia since products from here were taken to those places.
 - Had many sculptures and has a Mahachaitya. The sculptures are preserved in Chennai Museum, National Museum at Delhi, Amaravati Site Museum and the British Museum at London.
 - Amaravati Stupa has a pradakshinapatha and a vedica (fence) with many sculptures on it. The torana (gateway) has disappeared.
 - Unique feature of this stupa: the dome is covered with relief stupa sculptural slabs.
 - Events from Buddha's life and Jataka tales are depicted.
 - It was first built in the first century AD and in later centuries developed or enhanced.
 - Initial phase does not show Buddha images but they are seen from the later stages (like the stupa at Sanchi).
 - The sculptures have intense emotions. The figures are slender and show a lot of movement. The bodies are shown with 3 bents (tribhanga).
 - The structures are more complex than at Sanchi and are more animated.
 - There is a lot of attention paid to the forms' clarity.
- The sculptures of Goli and Nagarjunakonda in the 3rd century are reduced in animation but still very three-dimensional.
- Independent Buddha images at: Amaravati, Nagarjunakonda and Guntapalle. Guntappalle: Rock-cut cave site near Elluru.
- Other rock-cut stupas found at: Anakapalle (near Vishakhapatnam); and Sannati (largest in Karnataka).
- Apart from Buddha images, images of Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, Padmapani, Amitabha and Maitreya Buddha are also seen.