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Q1

Early Buddhist Stupa-art, while depicting folk motifs and narratives, successfully expounds Buddhist ideals. Elucidate.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2016 · GS I · 12 marks · Indian Heritage and Culture

Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of Art Forms, literature and Architecture from ancient to modern times.

Core demand of the question

- Early Buddhist Stupa-art, while depicting folk motifs and narratives, successfully expounds Buddhist ideals. Elucidate
- Cover railings, gateways, Jatakas, aniconic signs, and how folk forms carry dhamma
- Keep the explanation within a 12.5-mark length

Revision summary

Bharhut, **Sanchi**, and **Amaravati** wrap the relic stupa in folk figures and daily scenes.

Jataka and donor narratives teach giving, compassion, and renunciation in story form.

Aniconic signs such as footprints, wheel, and bodhi tree carry the **Buddha** without a human idol.

Circumambulation turns looking into practice.

Folk motif is the medium of the ideal, not a dilution of it.

Flow diagram

Folk yaksha lotus animal -> Stupa railing torana

Jataka donor stories -> Stupa railing torana

Stupa railing torana -> Dana karuna dhamma

Aniconic wheel throne tree -> Dana karuna dhamma

Conclusion

- Elucidate with named sites and named Jatakas, not with a general claim that Buddhist art is simple.
- **Stress that success lies in translation:** local motif and narrative become vehicles of Buddhist ethics, not rivals to them.

Early stupa-art used folk guardians, animals, and Jataka drama to teach dana, compassion, and non-self. The ideals are expounded because the carvings convert familiar forms into a walk around the relic, not because they abandon the popular world.

Facts & figures

Bharhut

Shunga-period stupa in Madhya Pradesh whose railings preserve labelled Jatakas and yaksha-yakshi figures.

Sanchi

Vidisha complex whose gateways show Jatakas, the Great Departure, and aniconic worship under Satavahana-era additions.

Amaravati

Andhra stupa school with dense narrative reliefs of the **Buddha's** life and Jatakas.

Aniconic Buddha

Early practice of showing the Teacher as throne, tree, wheel, footprints, or stupa rather than a human body.

Vessantara Jataka

Tale of extreme dana often carved on stupas to preach giving without remainder.

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