Ancient History · GS - I

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

EXAM YEAR	PAPER	SUBJECT
2016	GS - I	Ancient History

MARKS	WORD LIMIT
10	~150 words

Answer Hint

Stupa architecture; folk motifs; Jataka tales; Buddhist philosophy; symbolism; cultural synthesis

Model Answer

Introduction

Early Buddhist stupa art combined popular artistic traditions with Buddhist teachings, making complex spiritual ideals accessible to ordinary people.

Folk Motifs and Narratives

- **Jataka tales:** Depicted the Buddha’s previous births, illustrating compassion, sacrifice, generosity and moral conduct.
- **Popular symbols:** Lotus flowers, trees, animals, yakshas and yakshis reflected contemporary folk beliefs and nature worship.
- **Narrative panels:** Scenes from the Buddha’s life and stories of his followers communicated ethical lessons visually.
- **Aniconic representation:** At sites such as Sanchi and Bharhut, the Buddha was often represented through symbols such as the Bodhi tree, footprints, empty throne and Dharma Chakra.

Expression of Buddhist Ideals

- The Dharma Chakra symbolised the Buddha’s teachings.

- The Bodhi tree represented enlightenment.
- Stupa circumambulation encouraged devotion and reflection.
- Images of generosity and compassion reinforced the ethical principles of Buddhism.

Conclusion

Early Buddhist stupa art successfully integrated folk traditions with Buddhist philosophy, helping spread the Dhamma and creating a distinctive Indian artistic heritage.

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