



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the contribution of Mathura and Gandhara schools in the evolution of Buddhist art in India. **(150 words)**

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Approach

- Introduce the answer by briefing the significance of Mathura and Gandhara Art
- Delve into the Contribution of Mathura School in Evolution of Buddhist Art
- Highlight the Contribution of Gandhara School in Evolution of Buddhist Art
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

The **Mathura and Gandhara schools of art**, emerging during the early centuries of the **Christian era**, represent **two distinct yet interconnected traditions in Indian art**.

- While the Mathura School evolved indigenously, the **Gandhara School incorporated Greco-Roman influences**.
- Both schools significantly contributed to the depiction of Buddha and Buddhist narratives, shaping the development of Buddhist art in India.

Body

Mathura School of Art:

- **Period and Centers:** Originated in the 1st century CE, primarily in **Mathura (modern Uttar Pradesh)**.
 - Flourished under the **Kushan Empire** and reached its zenith during the **Gupta period (4th-6th century CE)**. Notable for the use of **spotted red sandstone**.
- **Contributions to Buddhist Art:**
 - **Human Representation of Buddha:** Transitioned from symbolic depictions (e.g., **footprints, stupas**) to anthropomorphic images.
 - Buddha is depicted as a **robust, energetic figure with spiritual depth**.
 - **Common features:**
 - Shaven head, muscular torso.
 - Right hand in **abhayamudra** (gesture of reassurance).
 - **Padmasana** (lotus posture) in seated depictions.
 - **Examples:** Seated Buddha under the **Bodhi tree with dharmachakra** and **triratna symbols on soles and palms**.
 - **Distinctive Style:** Indigenous craftsmanship emphasizing inner spirituality and facial expressions.
 - Figures carved in the round, visible from all angles.

Gandhara School of Art:

- **Period and Centers:** Flourished from the 1st century BCE to the 4th century CE.
 - **Prominent centers: Taxila, Peshawar, Bamiyan, and Begram** (modern-day Afghanistan and Northwest India).
- **Contributions to Buddhist Art:**
 - **Greco-Roman Influence:** Introduced **realism and anatomical precision**.
 - **Key features:**
 - Wavy hair, sharp facial features.
 - Draped garments in **Hellenistic style**.
 - Halo around Buddha's head, **borrowed from Greek traditions**.
 - **Depictions of Buddha:** Buddha is portrayed as serene and meditative, often resembling the **Greek god Apollo**.
 - Mastery of storytelling in Buddhist panels depicting **Jataka tales** and events from Buddha's life.
 - Use of **blue-grey schist**, giving sculptures a distinct finish.
 - **Artistic Realism:** Emphasis on bodily details, spatial depth, and emotional expressions.
 - **Examples: Standing Buddhas and seated Bodhisattvas** with Greek-style drapery and ornamentation.



Conclusion

The Mathura and Gandhara schools collectively enriched **Buddhist art, blending indigenous spirituality with foreign aesthetic sensibilities**. **Mathura's spiritual vigor** and **Gandhara's realistic finesse** laid the foundation for the universal appeal of Indian Buddhist art, ensuring its legacy in Asia and beyond.