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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Most of the art and architectural remains that survive from ancient and medieval India are religious in nature. Examine. (150 words)

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Approach

- Substantiate the given statement with the help of relevant examples.
- Also, cite few examples suggesting the non-religious nature of art and architectural remains from ancient and medieval India

Introduction

Art is an expression of human creative skills resulting in the production of painting, sculpture, or architecture. The development of an art form is usually impacted by the level of advancement of the society, the mindset and beliefs of the people and the type of patronage provided by the rulers and other stakeholders.

Body

- With changing times, better articulation of religious and socio-cultural beliefs develop which reflect in the contemporaneous art forms. Thus, the prehistoric art forms are confined to secular paintings like that of Bhimbetka rock shelters.
- Later, the animistic religious beliefs of Harappan Civilisation gets reflected in the terracotta figurines of mother goddess. With the further passage of time and emergence of Brahmanism, Buddhism, Jainism etc. more religious art forms in terms of Ajanta caves and paintings, Dashavatara temple (Deogarh) etc. surfaced.
- Later, in medieval India, under the patronage of Delhi Sultans, tombs and mosques emerged.
- Nevertheless, it must also be noted that non-religious or secular art forms were also getting importance. For example, the seals, terracotta toys, granary from Harappan Civilisation and palaces, gardens from medieval India.
- Similarly, the patronage provided by the rulers or the society also defines the type of art that gets developed. The Ashokan edicts, whose form and content was largely non-religious, incorporated principles of social conduct. During the Sultanate period emerged the Indo-Islamic form of architecture like tombs and mosques.
- Likewise, Akbar's period witnessed art and architecture of religious as well as secular forms (Fatehpur Sikri). The Mughal paintings also highlight the same feature as it depicted non-religious themes in terms of royal portraits and natural beauty.
- Another aspect of the development of art is those possessed by people in their homes. It is important to note that most of the art and architectural artworks were made from wood and clay which have perished over the course of time. Besides, several domestic items made of metals (like iron, bronze, silver and gold) were later melted down and reused from time to time.

Conclusion

Thus, the art and architectural forms of ancient and medieval India never confined themselves only to the making of mammoth buildings of religious places, though it contributed the most.