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1. Discuss the salient characteristics of Gandhara, Mathura, and Amaravati schools of art and architecture, highlighting how they reflect the cultural synthesis of their times.

The **Gandhara School** blends Greco-Roman realism with Buddhist themes, using grey schist. The **Mathura School** features indigenous styles with red sandstone and spiritual expressions. The **Amaravati School**, in South India, uses white marble and intricate carvings, showcasing dynamic storytelling. All reflect cultural fusion through regional and foreign influences.

Gandhara School:

Developed under **Indo-Greek and Kushana patronage** (1st–5th century CE) in present-day northwest Pakistan and Afghanistan, it was heavily influenced by **Greco-Roman styles**.

- Features: Wavy hair, realistic human anatomy, draped robes like Roman togas, use of grey schist stone.
- Notable Example: Buddha statue from Takshashila showing Hellenistic features.

Mathura School:

Flourished in **Uttar Pradesh**, under **Kushan and Gupta** rulers (1st century BCE onward), it represented indigenous traditions.

- Features: Use of **red sandstone**, robust figures, spiritual expression with less emphasis on realism.
- Notable Example: Seated Buddha from Katra Keshav Dev, Mathura.

Amaravati School:

Centered in the **Krishna River Valley** (Andhra Pradesh) under **Satavahana rule**, it evolved between 2nd century BCE and 3rd century CE.

- Features: White marble, intricate carvings, narrative panels depicting **Jataka tales**, emphasis on motion and emotion.
- Notable Example: Reliefs from the **Amaravati Stupa**, now partially housed in British Museum.

Cultural Synthesis Reflected:

- **Gandhara** symbolizes **Indo-Greek synthesis**—Greek aesthetics blended with Buddhist spirituality.
- **Mathura** integrates **indigenous Indian religious symbolism** with political patronage, including Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu themes.
- **Amaravati** reflects a fusion of **local Dravidian art** with pan-Indian Buddhist iconography, indicating religious and trade-based cultural exchange.

Conclusion:

These three art schools represent the **regional, political, and cross-cultural interactions** of ancient India. They not only promoted religious devotion but also mirrored the cosmopolitan character of their respective times.

2. Evaluate the role of Mauryan and Gupta rulers in shaping the cultural and social fabric of ancient India.

Mauryan Empire (c. 322–185 BCE):

The Mauryan Empire, founded by **Chandragupta Maurya**, was the first major empire in India, expanding across most of the Indian subcontinent. **Ashoka the Great**, the most prominent Mauryan ruler, embraced **Buddhism** after the Kalinga War and promoted **Dhamma** (moral laws). The empire also saw advancements in **administration, trade, and infrastructure**.

Gupta Empire (c. 320–550 CE):

The Gupta Empire, known as the **Golden Age of India**, was characterized by remarkable achievements in **science, mathematics, astronomy, and arts**. Rulers like **Chandragupta I** and **Samudragupta** promoted **Hinduism**, but also supported **Buddhism** and **Jainism**. Gupta India saw the flourishing of literature, philosophy, and religious tolerance.

Positive Role of Mauryan and Gupta Rulers:

1. Mauryan Rulers:

- **Ashoka's promotion of Buddhism** led to the spread of moral values and non-violence.
- Infrastructure, such as **roads** and **rest houses**, facilitated trade and communication.
- **Dhamma edicts** promoted social welfare and justice.

2. Gupta Rulers:

- **Patronage of arts and sciences** fostered advancements like **zero** and the **decimal system**.
- Gupta rulers promoted religious tolerance, supporting both **Hinduism** and **Buddhism**.
- **Literature and art** flourished, with figures like Kalidasa and Aryabhata.

Negative Role of Mauryan and Gupta Rulers:

1. Mauryan Rulers:

- The **Kalinga War**, though a turning point for Ashoka, had a significant **human cost**.
- **Centralized control** under Mauryas may have stifled local autonomy and diverse regional cultures.

2. Gupta Rulers:

- The **Hindu revivalism** during the Gupta period may have led to the **marginalization of other religions**, such as **Buddhism**.
- Social stratification became more rigid, and **caste discrimination** likely intensified during this period.

Conclusion:

Both the Mauryan and Gupta rulers played pivotal roles in shaping India's cultural and social fabric through their patronage of religion, arts, and infrastructure. While they contributed significantly to India's intellectual and spiritual legacy, some of their policies also had negative social implications.