

## Post Mauryan Trends in Indian Art and Architecture

From the second century BCE onwards, various rulers established their control over the vast Mauryan Empire: the Shungas, Kanvas, Kushanas and Guptas in the north and parts of central India; the Satvahanas, Ikshvakus, Abhiras and Vakataks in southern and western India.

Incidentally, the period of the second century BCE also marked the rise of the main Brahmanical sects such as the Vaishnavas and the Shaivas.

There are numerous sites dating back to the second century BCE in India. Some of the prominent examples of the finest sculpture are found at Vidisha, Bharhut (Madhya Pradesh), Bodhgaya (Bihar), Jaggayyapeta (Andhra Pradesh), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Khandagiri-Udaigiri (Odisha), Bhaja near Pune and Pavani near Nagpur (Maharashtra).

### **Bharhut**

1. Bharhut sculptures are tall like the images of Yaksha and Yakhshini in the Mauryan period, modelling of the sculptural volume is in low relief maintaining linearity.
2. Images stick to the picture plane. In the relief panels depicting narratives, illusion of three-dimensionality is shown with tilted perspective.
3. At Bharhut, narrative panels are shown with fewer characters but as the time progresses, apart from the main character in the story, others also start appearing in the picture space. At times more than one event at one geographical place is clubbed in the picture space or only a single main event is depicted in the pictorial space.
4. Narrative reliefs at Bharhut show how artisans used the pictorial language very effectively to communicate stories.
5. In one such narrative, showing Queen Mayadevi's (mother of Siddhartha Gautam) dream, a descending elephant is shown. The queen is shown reclining on the bed whereas an elephant is shown on the top heading towards the womb of Queen Mayadevi.
6. On the other hand, the depiction of a Jataka story is very simple—narrated by clubbing the events according to the geographical location of the story like the depiction of Ruru Jataka where the Boddhisattva deer is rescuing a man on his back.

7. Such Jataka stories became part of stupa decoration.
8. Interestingly, with the rise in the construction of stupas in various parts of the country, regional stylistic variations also began to emerge. One main characteristic in all the male images of first–second centuries BCE is the knotted headgear.

### Sanchi

1. The next phase of sculptural development at Sanchi Stupa-1, Mathura, and Vengi in Andhra Pradesh (Guntur District) is noteworthy in the stylistic progression.
2. Stupa-1 at Sanchi has upper as well as lower pradakshinapatha or circumambulatory path.
3. It has four beautifully decorated toranas depicting various events from the life of the Buddha and the Jatakas.
4. Figure compositions are in high relief, filling up the entire space.
5. Narration gets elaborated. Carving techniques appear more advanced than Bharhut.
6. Symbols continue to be used representing the Buddha and the Manushi Buddhas or the past Buddhas.
7. At Sanchi Stupa-1, narratives get more elaborated; however, the depiction of the dream episode remains very simple showing the reclining image of the queen and the elephant at the top.
8. The historical narratives such as the siege of Kushinara, Buddha's visit to Kapilavastu, visit of Ashoka to the Ramgrama Stupa are carved with considerable details.

### STUPA-1, SANCHI

1. Sanchi, about 50 km from Bhopal, the capital of Madhya Pradesh, is a world heritage site.
2. Along with other relatively small stupas, there are three main stupas at Sanchi. Stupa-1 is presumed to have the relics of the Buddha, Stupa-2, the relics of ten less famous arhats belonging to three different generations. Their names are found on the relic casket. Stupa-3 has the relics of Sariputta and Mahamougalayana.
3. Stupa-1, known for the carvings on its gateways is one of the finest examples of stupa architecture.
4. The Ashokan lioncapital pillar with an inscription is found on the southern side of the stupa, indicating how Sanchi became a centre of monastic and artistic activities. The south gateway was made first followed by the others.
5. The pradakshinapath around the stupa is covered with the vedika. There is also the upper pradakshinapath which is unique to this site.
6. The four gateways are decorated profusely with sculptures. Buddha is shown symbolically as an empty throne, feet, chhatra, stupas, etc.
7. Jatakas also become an important part of the narratives in stupas.
8. There are guardian images on pillars and also the shalbhanjika.
9. Each torana consists of two vertical pillars and three horizontal bars on the top. Each horizontal bar is decorated with different sculptural themes on the front as well as well as at the back.
10. Supporting the extensions of the lowermost horizontal bar from below are the images of shalbhanjikas.

### **Mathura, Sarnath and Gandhara Schools**

The first century CE onwards, Gandhara (now in Pakistan), Mathura in northern India and Vengi in Andhra Pradesh emerged as important centres of art production.

Buddha in the symbolic form got a human form in Mathura and Gandhara.

The sculptural tradition in Gandhara had the confluence of Bactria, Parthia and the local Gandhara tradition.

### **BUDDHA HEAD, TAXILA**

1. The Buddha head from Taxila in the Gandhara region, now in Pakistan, dates back to the second century CE and belongs to the Kushana Period.
2. It has Greco-Roman elements in the treatment of sculpture.
3. The Buddha head has typical Hellenistic elements that have grown over a period of time.
4. The curly hair of the Buddha is thick having a covered layer of sharp and linear strokes over the head.
5. The forehead plane is large having protruding eyeballs, the eyes are half-closed.
6. The ears are elongated especially the earlobes.
7. The expression of calmness is the centre point of attraction.
8. A large number of images have been found in the Gandhara region. They consist of narratives of the life of the Buddha, narrations from the Jataka stories, and Buddha and Bodhisattva images.
9. The local sculptural tradition at Mathura became so strong that the tradition spread to other parts of northern India.
10. The Buddha image at Mathura is modelled on the lines of earlier Yaksha images whereas in Gandhara it has Hellenistic features.
11. Images of Vaishnava (mainly Vishnu and his various forms) and Shaiva (mainly the lingas and mukhalingas) faiths are also found at Mathura but Buddhist images are found in large numbers.

12. It may be noted that the images of Vishnu and Shiva are represented by their ayudhas (weapons).
13. The garments of the body are clearly visible and they cover the left shoulder.
14. Images of the Buddha, Yakshas, Yakshinis, Shaivite and Vaishnavite deities and portrait statues are profusely sculpted.
15. Transparent quality in the robes of the Buddha images is evident.
16. In this period, two important schools of sculptures in northern India are worth noting.
17. The traditional centre, Mathura, remained the main art production site whereas Sarnath and Kosambi also emerged as important centres of art production.

#### **SEATED BUDDHA, KATRA MOUND, MATHURA**

1. Mathura was a great centre for making sculptures during the early historic period and many images have been found here.
2. A large number of images dating back to the Kushana Period is from Mathura.
3. The image of the Buddha from the Katra mound belongs to the second century CE. It represents the Buddha with two Bodhisattva attendants.
4. The Buddha is seated in padmasana (cross-folded legs) and the right hand is in the abhaya mudra, raised a little above the shoulder level whereas the left hand is placed on the left thigh.
5. The ushanisha, i.e., hair knot, is shown with a vertically raised projection.
6. The sanghati (garment) covers only one shoulder and has been made prominently visible covering the left hand.
7. The Buddha is seated on a lion throne.
8. The attendant figures are identified as the images of the Padmapani and Vajrapani Bodhisattvas as one holds a lotus and the other a vajra (thunderbolt). They wear crowns and are on either side of the Buddha.
9. The halo around the head of the Buddha is very large and is decorated with simple geometric motifs.

10. There are two flying figures placed diagonally above the halo.
11. Many Buddha images in Sarnath have plain transparent drapery covering both shoulders, and the halo around the head has very little ornamentation whereas the Mathura Buddha images continue to depict folds of the drapery in the Buddha images and the halo around the head is profusely decorated.

### **SEATED BUDDHA, SARNATH**

1. This image of the Buddha from Sarnath belonging to the late fifth century has been made in Chunar sandstone.
2. The Buddha is shown seated on a throne in the padmasana.
3. It represents dhammachakrapravartana as can be seen from the figures on the throne. The panel below the throne depicts a chakra (wheel) in the centre and a deer on either side with his disciples. Thus, it is the representation of the historical event of dhammachakrapravartana or the preaching of the dhamma.
4. This Buddha image is a fine example of the Sarnath school of sculpture.
5. The body is slender and well-proportioned but slightly elongated. The outlines are delicate, very rhythmic.
6. Drapery clings to the body and is transparent to create the effect of integrated volume.
7. The face is round, the eyes are half-closed, the lower lip is protruding.
8. The hands are shown in dhammachakrapravartana mudra placed just below the chest.
9. The ushanisha has circular curled hairs.
10. The aim of the sculptors in ancient India had always been to represent the Buddha as a great human being who achieved nibbana (i.e., cessation of anger and hate).
11. The back of the throne is profusely decorated with different motifs of flowers and creepers placed in a concentric circle.
12. The central part of the halo is plain without any decoration. It makes the halo

visually impressive.

### **Early Temples**

1. While construction of stupas continued, Brahmanical temples and images of gods also started getting constructed.
2. Often temples were decorated with the images of gods.
3. Myths mentioned in the Puranas became part of narrative representation of the Brahmanical religion.
4. Each temple had a principal image of a god.
5. The shrines of the temples were of three kinds—(i) sandhara type (without pradikshinapatha), (ii) nirandhara type (with pradakshinapatha), and (iii) sarvatobhadra (which can be accessed from all sides).
6. Some of the important temple sites of this period are Deogarh in Uttar Pradesh, Eran, Nachna-Kuthara and Udaygiri near Vidisha in Madhya Pradesh. These temples are simple structures consisting of a veranda, a hall and a shrine at the rear.

### **Buddhist Monuments of South India**

1. Vengi in Andhra Pradesh has many stupa sites like Jagayyapetta, Amaravati, Bhattiprolu, Nagarjunkonda, Goli, etc.
2. Amaravati has a mahachaitya and had many sculptures.
3. Like the Sanchi Stupa, the Amaravati Stupa also has pradakshinapatha enclosed within a vedika on which many narrative sculptures are depicted.
4. The domical stupa structure is covered with relief stupa sculptural slabs which is a unique feature.
5. Events from the life of the Buddha and the Jataka stories are depicted.
6. Like Sanchi, the early phase is devoid of Buddha images but during the later phase, in the second and third centuries CE, the Buddha images are carved on the drum slabs and at many other places.

7. Sculptural form in this area is characterised by intense emotions.
8. Figures are slender, have a lot of movement, bodies are shown with three bents (i.e. tribhanga), and the sculptural composition is more complex than at Sanchi.
9. Narratives are profusely depicted which include events from the life of the Buddha and the Jataka stories.
10. In the depiction of the birth event, the queen is shown reclining on a bed surrounded by female attendants and a small-sized elephant is carved on the upper frame of the composition showing the dream of Queen Mayadevi.
11. Independent Buddha images are also found at Amaravati, Nagarjunkonda and Guntapalle.
12. Guntapalle is a rock-cut cave site near Eluru. Small apsidal and circular chaitya halls have been excavated belonging to the second century BCE.
13. The other important site where rock-cut stupas have been excavated is Anakapalle near Vishakhapatnam.
14. Among the important structured viharas, mention may be made of the Sanchi apsidal chaitya structure, i.e., temple 18, which is a simple shrine temple having front pillars and a hall at the back.
15. Along with the images of the Buddha, other Buddhist images of Bodhisattvas like Avalokiteshvara, Padmapani, Vajrapani, Amitabha, and Maitreya Buddha started getting sculpted.
16. However, with the rise of Vajrayana Buddhism many Bodhisattva images were added as a part of the personified representations of certain virtues or qualities as propagated by the Buddhist religious principles for the welfare of the masses.

### **Cave Tradition in Western India**

In western India, many Buddhist caves dating back to the second century BCE onwards have been excavated.

### **Mainly three architectural types were executed—**

- (i) apsidal vault roof chaitya halls (found at Ajanta, Pitalkhora, Bhaja);
- (ii) apsidal vault-roof pillarless hall (found at Thana-Nadsur); and

(iii) flat-roofed quadrangular hall with a circular chamber at the back (found at Kondivite).

The front of the chaitya hall is dominated by the motif of a semi-circular chaitya arch with an open front which has a wooden facade and, in some cases, there is no dominating chaitya arch window such as found at Kondivite. In all the chaitya caves a stupa at the back is common.

Caves are also found at Bedsa, Nashik, Karla and Kanheri.

Many cave sites have the standard first type of chaitya halls. In Karla, the biggest rock-cut chaitya hall was excavated.

### **Karla Cave**

1. The cave consists of an open courtyard with two pillars, a stone screen wall to protect from rain, a veranda, a stone-screen wall as facade, an apsidal vault-roof chaitya hall with pillars, and a stupa at the back.
2. Karla chaitya hall is decorated with human and animal figures.
3. They are heavy in their execution, and move in the picture space.
4. Further elaboration over the Karla chaitya hall plan is observed at Kanheri Cave No.3. Though the cave's interior was not fully finished, it shows how the carving progressed from time to time.
5. Subsequently, the quadrangular flat-roofed variety became the most preferred design and is extensively found at many places.
6. The viharas are excavated in all the cave sites.
7. The plan of the viharas consists of a veranda, a hall and cells around the walls of the hall.
8. Some of the important vihara caves are Ajanta Cave No. 12, Bedsa Cave No. 11, Nashik Cave Nos. 3, 10 and 17.
9. Many of the early vihara caves are carved with interior decorative motifs like chaitya arches and the vedica designs over the cell doors of the cave.
10. Facade design in Nashik Cave Nos. 3, 10, and 17 became a distinct achievement. The vihara caves at Nashik were excavated with front pillars carved with ghata-base and ghata-capital with human figures.

11. Junnar has the largest cave excavations— more than two hundred caves around the hills of the town—whereas Kanheri in Mumbai has a hundred and eight excavated caves.
12. The most important sites are Ajanta, Pitalkhora, Ellora, Nashik, Bhaja, Junnar, Karla, Kanheri.
13. Ajanta, Ellora, and Kanheri continue to flourish.
14. It may also be noted that many caves are converted into modern Hindu shrines and have become popular worshipping sites.

### **Ajanta**

1. The most famous cave site is Ajanta. It is located in Aurangabad District of Maharashtra State.
2. Ajanta has twenty-nine caves. It has four chaitya caves. It has large chaityaviharas and is decorated with sculptures and paintings.
3. Ajanta is the only surviving example of painting of the first century BCE and the fifth century CE.
4. The chaitya Cave Nos. 19 and 26 are elaborately carved. Their facade is decorated with Buddha and, Boddhisattva images. They are of the apsidal-vault-roof variety.
5. Cave No. 26 is very big and the entire interior hall is carved with a variety of Buddha images, the biggest one being the Mahaparinibbana image.
6. The rest of the caves are vihara-chaitya caves. They consist of a pillared veranda, a pillared hall and cells along the walls. The back wall has the main Buddha shrine.
7. Shrine images at Ajanta are grand in size.
8. Among the important patrons at Ajanta were Varahadeva, the prime minister of the Vakataka king, Harishena; Upendragupta, the local king of the region and feudatory of the Vakataka king, Harishena; Buddhabhadra; and Mathuradasa.
9. Many paintings have survived in Cave Nos. 1, 2, 16 and 17.
10. Paintings have a lot of typological variations. Outward projections are used in the Ajanta paintings of the fifth century CE. Lines are clearly defined and are very

- rhythmic. Body colour gets merged with the outer line creating the effect of volume.
11. Figures in these caves are painted with considerable naturalism and there is no over-stylisation.
  12. Events are grouped together according to geographical location. Tiered, horizontally arranged figures appear as a convenient choice of the artisans.
  13. Separation of geographic location has been indicated by using outward architectural bands.
  14. It may also be observed that various skin colours are used in the paintings such as brown, yellowish brown, greenish, yellow ochre, etc. which represent a multicoloured population.
  15. Different guilds of artisans seem to have worked on the paintings of these caves which can be inferred from their typological and stylistic variations.
  16. The themes of the paintings are the events from the life of the Buddha, the Jatakas and the Avadanas.
  17. Some paintings such as Simhala Avadana, Mahajanaka Jataka and Vidhurpundita Jataka cover the entire wall of the cave.
  18. Events that happened in the jungle and events that happened in the palace are separated by their locations.
  19. In one of the events, the Bodhisattva, Chaddanta, is shown removing his own tusk and giving it to the hunter, Sonuttar.
  20. The other important paintings are the famous Padmapani and Vajrapani in Cave No. 1. However, it may be observed that the images of Padmapani and Vajrapani are very common in Ajanta but the best preserved paintings are in Cave No.1.
  21. Some figures in Cave No. 2 have affiliation with the Vengi sculptures and at the same time, the influence of the Vidarbha sculptural tradition is also observed in the delineation of some sculptures.

### **PADMAPANI BODDHISATTVA--AJANTA CAVE NO. 1**

1. This painting on the back wall of the interior hall dates back to the late fifth century CE.
2. The Bodhisattva is holding a padma (lotus), has large shoulders, and has three bents in the body creating a movement in the picture space.
3. The figure of the Bodhisattva is wearing a big crown in which detailed rendering is visible. The head is slightly bent to the left. The eyes are half-closed and are slightly elongated. The nose is sharp and straight.
4. The right hand is holding a lotus and the left hand is extended in the space. The Bodhisattva is surrounded by small figures.
5. On the other side of the image Vajrapani Bodhisattva has been painted. He holds a vajra in his right hand and wears a crown.
6. Cave No. 1 has many interesting paintings of Buddhist themes such as Mahajanak Jataka, Umag Jataka, etc. The Mahajanak Jataka is painted on the entire wall side and is the biggest narrative painting.
7. It may be observed that the paintings of Padmapani and Vajrapani and the Bodhisattvas are painted as shrine guardians.

### **MARA VIJAYA**

1. The theme of Mara Vijaya has been painted in the caves of Ajanta.
2. It is sculpted near the colossal Buddha image of Mahaparinibbana.
3. The panel shows the image of the Buddha in the centre surrounded by Mara's army along with his daughter.
4. The event is part of the enlightenment. It is a personification of the commotion of mind which the Buddha went through at the time of enlightenment.
5. Mara represents desire. According to the narrative, there is a dialogue between the Buddha and Mara, and the Buddha is shown with his right hand indicating towards earth as a witness to his generosity.
6. The figure on the right shows Mara coming with his army consisting of various kinds of people including some with grotesque animal faces. The dancing figures are at the lower base with the musicians.

7. On the left lower end, the image of Mara is shown contemplating how to disturb Siddhartha.
8. The army of Mara is shown marching towards the Buddha in the first half of the panel whereas the lower half of the panel shows the departing army of Mara giving him adorations.
9. The centrally placed Buddha is in padmasana and a tree at the back is shown by dense leaves.
10. This is the largest sculptural panel at Ajanta. There are several other big images in the caves of Ajanta.

### **Ellora**

1. Another important cave site located in Aurangabad District is Ellora.
2. It has thirty-two Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain caves.
3. It is a unique art-historical site in the country as it has monasteries associated with the three religions dating from the fifth century CE onwards to the eleventh century CE.
4. It is also unique in terms of stylistic eclecticism, i.e., confluence of many styles at one place.
5. The caves of Ellora and Aurangabad show the ongoing differences between the two religions—Buddhism and Brahmanical.
6. There are twelve Buddhist caves having many images belonging to Vajrayana Buddhism like Tara, Mahamayuri, Akshobhya, Avalokiteshwara, Maitrya, Amitabha, etc.
7. Buddhist caves are big in size and are of single, double and triple storeys. Their pillars are massive.
8. Ajanta also has excavated double-storeyed caves but at Ellora, the triple storey is a unique achievement.
9. The shrine Buddha images are big in size; they are generally guarded by the images of Padmapani and Vajrapani.
10. Cave No. 12, which is a triple-storey excavation, has images of Tara,

Avalokiteshwara, Manushi Buddhas and the images of Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, Amoghsiddhi, Vajrasatva and Vajraraja.

11. On the other hand, the only double-storey cave of the Brahmanical faith is Cave No. 14.
12. The Brahmanical cave Nos. 13–28 have many sculptures. Many caves are dedicated to Shaivism, but the images of both Shiva and Vishnu and their various forms according to Puranic narrative are depicted.
13. Among the Shaivite themes, Ravana shaking Mount Kailash, Andhakasurvadha, Kalyanasundara are profusely depicted whereas among the Vaishnavite themes, the different avatars of Vishnu are depicted.
14. Various guilds at Ellora came from different places like Vidarbha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and carved the sculptures.
15. A rock-cut temple has been carved out of a single rock, a unique achievement of the artisans (discussed in temple chapter notes).

#### **Elephanta Caves and Other Sites**

1. The Elephanta Caves located near Mumbai, were originally a Buddhist site which was later dominated by the Shaivite faith.
2. It is contemporary with Ellora, and its sculptures show slenderness in the body, with stark light and dark effects.

#### **MAHESHMURTI, ELEPHANTA**

1. The image of Maheshmurti at Elephanta dates back to the early sixth century CE.
2. It is located in the main cave shrine.
3. The image is large in size. The central head is the main Shiva figure whereas the other two visible heads are of Bhairava and Uma.
4. The face of Shiva-Bhairava is clearly shown in profile in anger with bulging eye and mustache.
5. The other face showing feminine characters is of Uma who is the consort of Shiva.

6. One of the shilpa texts mentions five integrated faces of Shiva and this image, despite being shown with only three faces, is considered as of the same variety and the top and back faces are deemed as invisible.
7. Each face has a different crown as per its iconographic prescription. This sculpture has been sculpted on the south wall of the cave along with the sculpture of Ardhanarishwara and the Gangadhara panel.
8. The other noteworthy cave site is Bagh located near Indore in Madhya Pradesh.
9. The tradition of rock-cut caves continued in the Deccan and they are found not only in Maharashtra but also in Karnataka, mainly at Badami and Aiholi, executed under the patronage of the Chalukyas; in Andhra Pradesh in the area of Vijayawada; and in Tamil Nadu, mainly at Mahabalipuram, under the patronage of the Pallavas.
10. The post-sixth-century development of art history in the country depended more on political patronage than the collective public patronage of the early historic periods.

#### **Cave Tradition in Eastern India**

1. Like in western India, Buddhist caves have also been excavated in eastern India, mainly in the coastal region of Andhra Pradesh, and in Odisha.
2. One of the main sites in Andhra Pradesh is Guntapalle in Eluru district. The caves have been excavated in the hills along with the structured monasteries.
3. Apart from Guntapalle, the other important cave site is Rampaerrampallam which has very moderate small excavations but there are rock-cut stupas on the hillock.
4. The rock-cut cave tradition also existed in Odisha. The earliest examples are the Udaigiri-Khandagiri caves in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar. These caves are scattered and have inscriptions of Kharavela kings. According to the inscriptions, the caves were meant for Jain monks.