ASPECTS OF ANCIENT INDIAN ART AND ARCHITECTURE

M.A. History

Semester - I

MAHIS - 101

SHRI VENKATESHWARA UNIVERSITY

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SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Aspects of Ancient Indian Art and Architecture

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
UNIT 1: Sculptures of the Indus Valley Civilization	**Unit 1:** Sculptures of the Indus Valley Civilisation **(Pages 3-45)**
UNIT 2: Mauryan art	**Unit 2:** Mauryan Art **(Pages 47-76)**
UNIT 3: Early Buddhist Sculptures	**Unit 3:** Early Buddhist Art and Architecture **(Pages 77-106)**
UNIT 4: Emergence of Regional Schools: • Gandhar • Mathura • Amaravati • Sarnath	**Unit 4:** Emergence of Regional Schools **(Pages 109-142)**
UNIT 5: Sculptures of Assam • Early phase • Pala-Sena art • Kamarupa • Deopani	**Unit 5:** Art and Sculpture of Assam **(Pages 143-166)**

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

The culture and history of India is dynamic, unique and intriguing. It is amongst the first civilizations to have come into existence. Historical records trace the beginnings of this great nation to the Indus Valley Civilization, which was one of the oldest known civilizations in the world. Some of the most striking aspects of the discoveries in the Indus Valley are the town planning and architecture, art and crafts. Much has been known about the town planning and architecture of the Harappan civilization. The cities boasted of well-planned roads (wide and straight) and houses provided with an efficient drainage system and ventilation. Following the decline of the Indus Civilization, Aryan tribes migrated from the north-west frontier into the Indian subcontinent during the second millennium BC. The Aryans settled in the middle Ganges River valley.

Contacts with Central Asian people between 200 BC and AD 100 brought to India new methods of coin making and sculpture making. Many schools of art emerged in India, such as Gandhara School, Mathura School and Amravati School. Gandhâra style of Buddhist art is a consequence of merger of Greek, Syrian, Persian and Indian art traditions. The development of this form of art started in Parthian Period (50BC–AD75) and achieved its peak during the Kushana period. Mathura school of art is regarded as a centre of ancient Indian art. The period of Mathura school of art coincided with the rule of the Kushanas. This school also reached the zenith of success during the reign of the Kushanas and expanded further in the Gupta period. The artists of Mathura school of art created sculptures which are immortal in the history of art in India. Amaravati school of art and sculpture evolved during the Satavahana period. Amaravati School is credited with depicting Buddha in the human form for the first time.

In the 4th and 5th centuries AD, northern India was integrated under the Gupta Dynasty. During this period, which is often referred to as the Golden Age of India, Hindu culture and political administration attained great heights. The Gupta period witnessed a brilliant development in the fields of architecture, sculpture and painting. Their rule witnessed a culmination of earlier tendencies and style and the beginning of new style and technique in the field of architecture.

The book, *Aspects of Ancient Indian Art and Architecture*, is written in SIM (Self Instructional Material) format for Distance Learning. Each unit starts with an Introduction and Objectives. Then, the detailed content is presented in an understandable and organized manner. Each unit has Check Your Progress questions to test the readers' understanding of the topics covered. A Summing Up along with a list of Key Terms and a set of Questions and Exercises is provided at the end of each unit for effective recapitulation.

UNIT 1 SCULPTURES OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

NOTES

STRUCTURE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Indus Civilization is one of the three civilizations in the 'Ancient East' which along with Mesopotamia and Egypt was the cradle of early civilization in the Old World. It was christened the 'Indus Civilization' by British India's great Director General of Archaeology, Sir John Marshall. The term Harappan Civilization has also been applied to these people since their remains were first discovered from the city of Harappa on the left bank of the river Ravi in Punjab.

Fig. 1.1 *Major Areas of Indus Civilization*

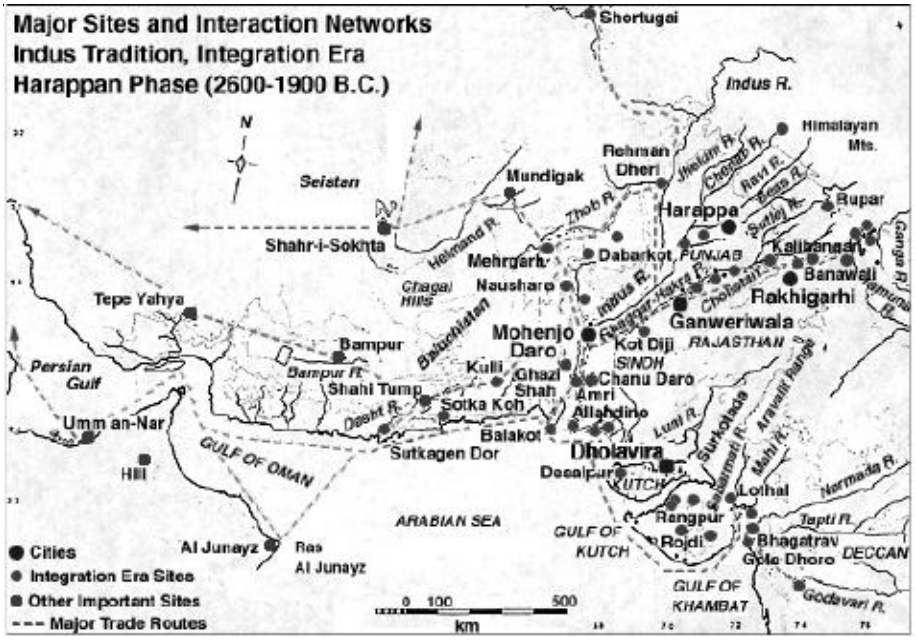

Fig. 1.2 *Sites and Interaction Network of the Harappan Age*

Generally, the Harappan Civilization is divided into three stages: the formative period or the 'Early Harappan', the 'Mature Harappan' and the period of the abandonment of the cities and the termination of writing and crafts or the 'Late Harappan'. The division has been made keeping in mind the development and the condition of the Harappan cities.

In the literature of Archaeology, the remains of the sites of Harappa are often named as 'Mature Harappan' which signifies the times the urban centres, crafts and trade of the civilization flourished. The time period of Mature Harappan is often dated from 2500-1900 BC. Its remains traces evidences of long distance trading with Mesopotamia, Central Asia and even with countries near the Red Sea.

In this unit, you will learn the dynamics of the Harappan people and see how they have transited a small cultural settlement of a rural area into an urban civilization. Also, you will learn about the sculpture, art, architecture and the religious beliefs of the people of that time. In addition to this, you will also find the answer to the question of why their drainage system is still referred to as 'one of the best drainage systems in the world'.

Earlier, this civilization was named as the Harappan Civilization as archaeologists found the artifacts in Harappa and its nearby areas but eventually it was discovered that the civilization was settled all over the Indus Valley and so it was named 'Indus Valley Civilization'. However, lately archaeologists have found that the settlement was not only confined to Indus Valley Civilization but spread in the nearby areas also and so finally the name had been changed again and renamed the 'Indus Civilization'.

The Indus Civilization extended from today's northeast Afghanistan to Pakistan and India. Its centre lies in the middle of major river systems like the Indus and Ghaggar Harka rivers. The Indus, one of the greatest rivers of Asia, flows through the valley, passing the Himalayas and coursing through a vast dry area before emptying into the Arabian Sea.

The Harappan people used gold and silver but mainly they relied upon copper alloys i.e. copper mixed with tin, lead or arsenic. Bronze, a type of copper alloy, was essential for tools of production used to manufacture several handicrafts and also help in agriculture. This is why Indus Civilization is also known as the Bronze Age Civilization. A few historians believe that Indus Civilization originated in 6500 BC as they believe that the earliest buildings were built at that time.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the Indus Civilization
- Describe the art and architecture of the Harappan people
- Identify sculptures found at some of the main Harappan sites
- Discuss different types of sculptures made of terracotta, stone and metal
- Explain the town planning and drainage system of the Indus Valley Civilization
- Describe seals, beads and other processes of manufacturing artifacts

1.2 ORIGIN OF THE INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

The origin of the Indus Civilization is a mystery for archaeologists and historians. It is a puzzle which still misses a few pieces as the date of origin of the civilization is still unknown.

The early developments in agriculture and animal-rearing are traced back to 6500 BC. The villages of the countries before 2600 BC were found not only on the Indus plains but also in the river valleys amongst the mountains of Baluchistan.

One of the major problems with the Indus Civilization is its script. The only sources through which we can know about the Indus Civilization are archaeological artifacts, mainly because the script has not been deciphered as yet. However, a few historians have claimed to have deciphered it and matched it with pictographs and computer languages, with a few comparing it with other spoken contemporary languages.

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As mentioned above, due to the non-decipherment of the script of Harappa, the historians are completely dependent upon other stray materials and evidences to study the origin of the civilization. The discovery of the rich archaeological artifacts (which we will discuss in detail) was the first major breakthrough for the archaeologists. The first accounts of the Indus Civilization come from written texts in southern Mesopotamia from about 2400 BC and in these records we find that they refer to this region as the land of 'Meluhha'. Synchronisms with Mesopotamia and radio-carbon dating of numerous materials from Harappan sites have helped archaeologists to confirm the time bracket 2600-1800 BC as the period for the Mature Harappan period.

On the eve of its discovery, Indus Civilization was called the 'Indo-Sumerian Civilization' by Sir John Marshall as Indus-style seals were present in Mesopotamia and southwestern Iran but soon this incorrect notion was dropped.

According to the Archaeological Survey of India, 1861 marks the beginning of official archaeological research in the region with the final naming of the civilization occurring in twentieth century. But understanding on the Indus Civilization has lagged behind and so, we will also discuss the ways in which archaeologists have met the challenge of reconstructing the civilization without the aid of written records.

In 1829, Charles Masson recorded the presence of archaeological sites and monuments which were published in three volumes detailing the ancient settlements and ruins of Harappa. Clearly, Masson was impressed with Harappa's massive size and its several high mounds.

Later, Alexander Cunningham visited Harappa and saw the massive wall which he mistook as a Buddhist monastery, and planned to return to the site and conduct excavation. Later in his life, he published a brief account of his investigations and illustrated various artifacts like stone tools, pottery and small objects. The seals from Harappa confused him as they bore a writing that was certainly not Indian and thus, was foreign to India. Other than Cunningham, Masson and Marshal; several other historians excavated and worked on Indus Civilization like R.D. Banerji, Daya Ram Sahni and Mortimer. And it was Daya Ram Sahni and R.D. Banerji who were quick to realize (after the excavation of Mohanjedero) that these sites i.e. Harappa and Mohenjodaro represented the same culture.

How Mohenjodaro got its name is very interesting. The people who lived near the region, mainly Sindhi population, thought it to be an old burial site and so they named it Mohenjodaro which means the 'mounds of dead'. The sites of Harappa are found in Sind, Makran, Baluchistan, Punjab, Haryana, north Rajasthan, Kathiawad, Kutch and Bandakhstan in the modern states of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.

Before the actual excavation, there was an interesting story mentioned in the folklores of the people who lived near Harappa to explain the ruins of Harappa, especially a ruined castle built on mounds. They believed that it was a castle of an evil and cruel spirit which was burnt by God as a way of punishing the spirit.

Now we will discuss the geography of the Indus Civilization.

Check Your Progress

1. Identify the sources through which we can know about the Indus Civilization.
2. Where are the sites of Harappa found?

1.3 GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT

In this section, we will discuss the geography of the Indus Civilization and the present precise locations. The Indus Civilization was spread over an area of approximately one million square kilometres. As mentioned earlier it is one of the most expansive civilizations

because it covers regions of present Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Here, it is very important to understand the geographical extension of the civilization because knowing about geography will help you to comprehend their living conditions.

The principal regions of the Indus Civilization are Baluchistan and the North-West frontier, the mountains on eastern end of the Iranian plateau which also includes the plains of the Indus valley, Punjab of Pakistan and India, Haryana and the Ganga-Yamuna doab. The people of the Indus occupied the northern and western areas of Thar Desert in Rajasthan and also, the sandy north Gujarat plains, Kutch and the hilly savannas of Saurashtra.

Western domains depended upon winter Westerlies for rain, which brought snow to the mountains of Baluchistan and the North-west Frontier and rain to Punjab and north-western India.

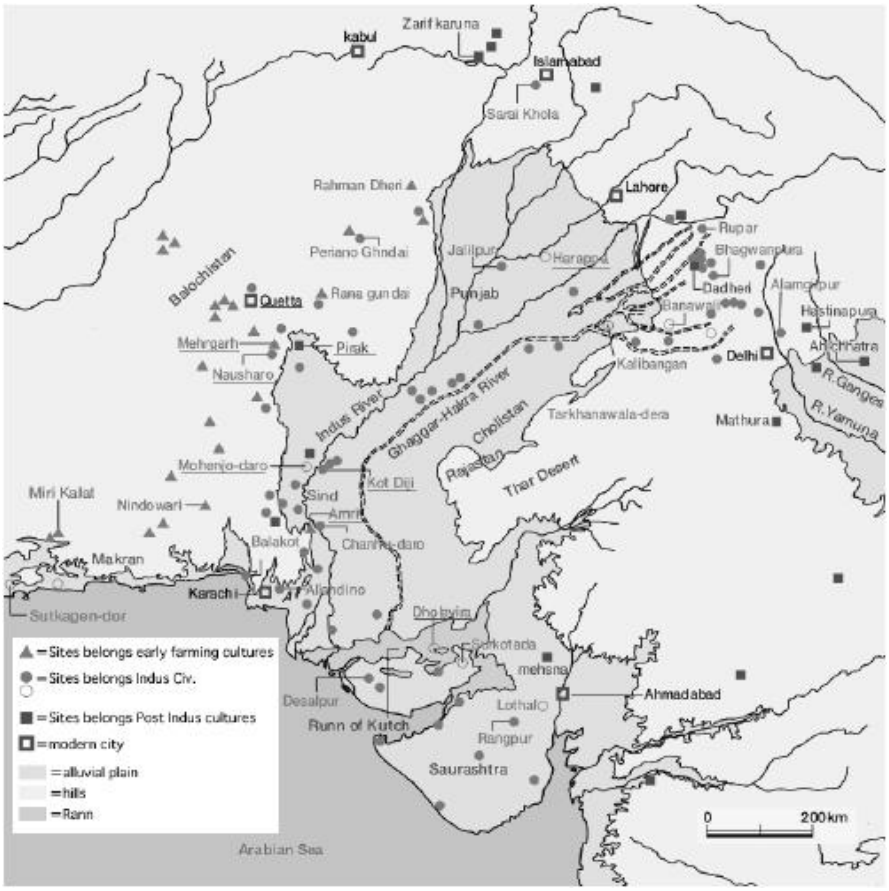

Fig. 1.3 *Geographical Extension of the Harappan Civilization*

Since we are in the area of the Indus Civilization, it is very important to understand the geographical location of the Indus River. As mentioned earlier, Indus River flowed through the Valley, passing the Himalayas to the dry zones and emptying itself into the Arabian Sea. The alluvium from the Indus River is very fertile and is renewed every year.

Several scholars attained the channel history of the Indus River by identifying the channel, studying its shape, direction, and preservation. It is a sad truth of Indian history that after the division of India, all important and major sites of the Indus Civilization have become a part of modern Pakistan and the sites within India are Kalibangan (modern

day Shriganganagar, Rajasthan); Lothal and Rangpur (Ahmedabad, Gujarat); Surkotada and Dholavira (Kaihha, Gujarat); Rakhigarhi (Punjab); Mitathal (Bhiwani) and Banavali (Ropad).

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1.4 TOWN PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE

Town planning is one of the main characteristics of the Indus Civilization and in this section we will discuss the town planning of Indus cities. Firstly, we will go through an overview i.e. the generalized planning and later, we will analyse each of the cities in detail. Architecture is a major part of town planning and hence, it will also be discussed later in this section.

Fig. 1.4 *Ariel View: Town Planning of Mohenjodaro*

1.4.1 City Plans and Physical Layouts

Each city of the Indus Civilization was well-planned and enclosed by walls. The north-south, east, west of the city of Mohenjodaro showed slight divergences. The digging at Mohenjodaro has unearthed remains of houses running almost seven metres in depth, and perhaps, the older remains lie below the water table. All the evidence points to a stability of the urban economy at this location. Although it had a grid-like plan some streets ran parallel to the walls that circled parts of the city.

The brilliance of the town plan can be seen from the fact that cities were divided into separate sectors. There was a division of high and low towns, which has been observed at Mohenjodaro and Dholavira but not at Harappa.

At Dholavira, the high ground is along the north-west, where the castle and Bailey (names given by the excavator) were located. High parts of the town sat prominently at the north-west which is why high ground was located along the north-west. Additionally, the high part of the town was divided by walls to separate it from the lower town.

The cities of Mohenjodaro and Harappa mainly consisted of residential areas. The baked brick residential structures at Mohenjodaro were connected to their neighbours

by shared walls. A few houses contained a courtyard and one or two sleeping rooms. The houses were different in size which signifies that it was a non-egalitarian society.

Mortar is found at Mohenjodaro which is believed to be used to bind brick and stone together. Quicklime was also found in a bead factory at Lothal.

1.4.2 Non-residential Structures

When the three cities are compared, there are similarities and differences in the planning of non-residential buildings. At Harappa, there were non-residential structures on the west and northwest of the city.

At Mohenjodaro and Dholavira, they were located in the elevated sections of towns. The eighteen metres high mound of Mohenjodaro which is estimated to spread over eight hectares contains a large building (structure) containing a colonnade surrounding a sunken pool. It is referred to as 'The Great Bath' or 'The Granary'—based upon the presence of a possible wooden staircase or ramp for moving grain.

Wheeler, in 1968, identified a building as 'College' which consisted of small cell like rooms. A structure has been discovered in the north-west of the site named as 'Stupa'. Another building was named a 'monastery' by Marshal and R.D. Banerji.

1.4.3 Public Works

Public works are one of the most innovative aspects of the Indus Civilization as Harappan engineers specialized in many innovations designed to control waste disposal and to prevent encroachment of floodwaters on buildings which could, otherwise, result in their destruction from a rising saline water table. Probably not until the later Roman period, did people derive so many clever construction techniques to deal with comforts and discomforts.

One of the major features of the Harappan civilization, which is considered to be their invention, was the toilet. It was built of baked bricks and probably wood. More numerous than toilets, since only a few toilets have been found till now, were bathing platforms. They were built either as separate rooms or in the corners of multipurpose rooms. Most were built-in platforms; some had stairs and platforms above them to support bathers who were showering. All the used water then flowed into elaborate sewage systems.

1.4.4 Drainage System and Waste Management

It is always said that the drainage of the Indus Civilization was more advanced as compared to today's drainage system and it is referred to as 'the best drainage system in the world'. Sewage drains included outlets for each house that spilled out into drains that ran along the edge of the streets or into sump pits. At Mohenjodaro, the streets and lanes in all of the neighbourhoods were provided with drainage. The houses were provided with the facility of management of waste water with intramural drains, vertical drain pipes in the walls, chutes through walls going to the streets, and drains from bathing floors went into the street drains. In areas where two or more drains met, cesspits were built to avoid lagging. Solids would sink to the bottom and liquids would flow into a large system of drains.

Large ceramic vessels also were placed in household courtyards as a reasonably inexpensive means of collecting waste from various household activities. The walls were raised using bricks so as to reuse the drains. Mostly, drains were covered with

brick or stone as they were under the street or the ground. The most common cover was simply an ordinary baked brick laid flat across the sidewalls, although bricks laid on an edge across the channel were also well-decentred.

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Fig. 1.5 *A Drain of Mohenjodaro*

Drains were mostly hidden underground, out of the way of the traffic. Water from inside the houses was led into a street drain, but there were other facilities also like brick lined cesspits and pottery jars embedded along the streets to collect the sewage from the houses. But clearly, it was important for the water from bathing floors to be moved out through the outlets of the individual houses so that it wasn't allowed to sink directly into the ground.

1.5 SOME MAJOR SITES

Some of the major sites of Indus civilization have been discussed in this section.

1. Mohenjodaro

Gregory L. Possehl in his book *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective* mentions Mohenjodaro as the epitome of all Mature Harappan settlements. The activities occurring at Mohenjodaro were the essence of the Harappan life and ideology. When we view the architecture of Mohenjodaro, we cannot fail to be impressed. Baked bricks were so well made and fired that they have retained their redness and hardness till today, and they are free of cracks, chips and cavities. Mortar, that was used to bind the bricks, was mostly mud whereas mud and gypsum mortar were rare. Yet parts of some walls still stand five metres high. Buildings were constructed out of a judicious combination of mud brick and baked brick, wooden beams and rafters for upper storeys or roofs, occasionally brick and thatch for roofing. Sun-dried mud brick and baked brick could be used alternatively in the same building.

Fig. 1.6 *The Great Bath of Mohenjodaro*

2. Harappa

Harappa is the old Mature Harappan city, with its settlement reaching back to 3800 BC. It is located near the banks of the Ravi River where substantial agriculture is possible. It stands amidst extensive fields which were made productive due to canals built during the colonial period. Few wells have been found here but, like Mohenjodaro, buildings were raised on mud or brick platforms.

Archaeological discoveries dating to the Mature Harappan have been found under alluvium deposits around the city, and no one is certain of the city's court size but it is estimated to be as large as two hundred hectares with a population density of about two hundred people per hectare.

A number of round brick platforms constructed with four symmetric circles of bricks, laid on their longer sides, with each platform of about 3.5 metres in diameter with hollow centres, were used for pounding grain, according to Mortimer Wheeler, but current excavators do not agree.

Archaeologists have found over two hundred pottery items along with broken tools, ash, charcoal, potsherds and occasional pires of slag or seeds.

When we talk about the Indus Civilization, we come across areas with the term 'citadel' which means 'large buildings' like 'The Great Bath' at Mohenjodaro. We have found similar citadels in Harappa, the purpose of which has not been defined as yet. The important artifacts which we have been found here are square Indus stamp seals, on red painted pottery and carnelian beads, some of which were etched. There is a considerable use of baked brick. The Granary at Harappa is a major discovery.

Fig. 1.7 *The Granary at Harappa*

Harappa is an extraordinary place and much more about the Indus Civilization can be learnt from it. The continued excavations, by a team of excellent archaeologists, offer us new and important insights into the Harappan and its successors.

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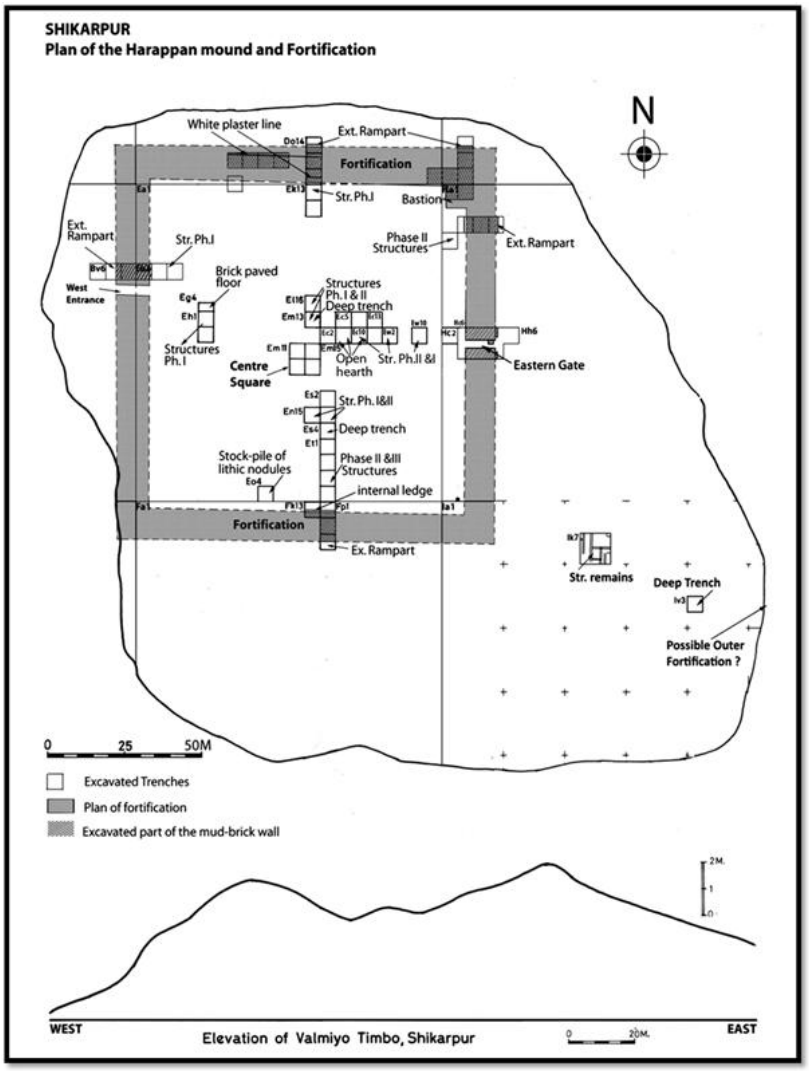

Fig. 1.8 *The Plan of the Harappan Site of Shikarpur*

3. Ganweriwala

A third, unexcavated Indus city, Ganweriwala, is located about 50 kilometres south-west of Fort Derawara in the Cholistan Desert. It was discovered by the Mughal as a part of their surveillance of the region. It is about eighty hectares in size and seems to have been founded on virgin soil, just as Mohenjodaro probably was.

Ganweriwala is almost as big as Mohenjodaro and is located almost exactly halfway between Mohenjodaro and Harappa. In terms of locational geography, it is perfectly situated within the Mature Harappan settlement grid as an urban centre.

4. Rakhigarhi

Rakhigarhi is also known as Rakhishahpur. It is a huge mound in the Hisar district of Haryana. In 1964, Suraj Bhan discovered Rakhigarhi. There are both Sothi-Siswal and Mature Harappan occupations at the site.

The site is about seventeen metres in height. The southern face of the mounds is rather abrupt and steep. The northern side slopes down to the surrounding plains. The contours of the side have led the excavation to divide it up into five mounds. The size of Rakhigarhi is estimated to be around eighty hectares.

Occupation at Rakhigarhi began during the Early Harappan, Sothi-Siswal period, although some Hakra wares are present. The understanding of this period is still little. Baked bricks were intensively used in this period which is very unusual for the Early Harappan. The bricks had graffiti marks on them, some signs of which are close to those in the Indus script. A baked brick street drain was found, to which a house drain was connected. The street drain is in the vicinity of a floor made of bricks with four circular pits, perhaps drying vats.

Several 'unicorn' seals have been found, along with a terracotta amulet with an elephant on the front. Of particular interest is a faïence cylinder seal, with the long snouted Indus crocodile, the ghariyal, along with the Indus script. Assorted metal objects, including those of copper-bronze, gold and silver, have been discovered as well.

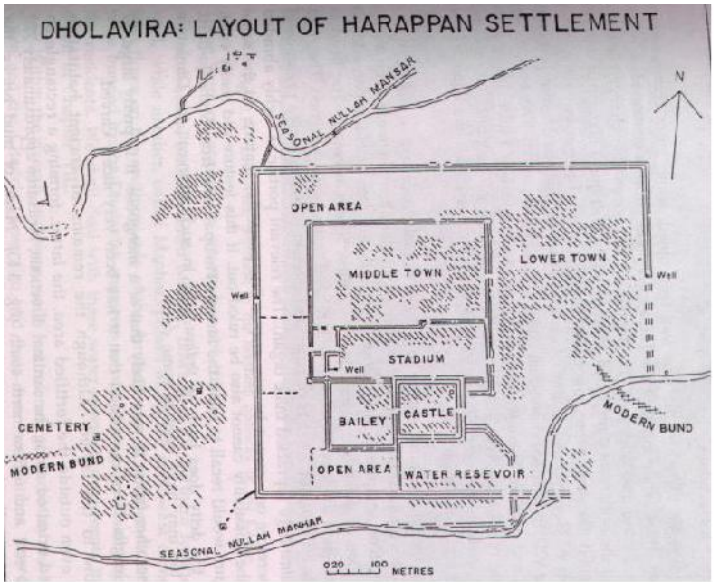

Fig. 1.9 *Dholavira: Plan of Settlement*

5. Dholavira

This has been an important site of the Indus age which is being excavated by the ASI since 1989. This site was discovered by J.P. Joshi in 1967-68 on Kadir Island in the central part of the Great Rann of Kutch spreading to 60 hectares.

Excavations have revealed that Dholavira has a long sequence of habitation that seems to begin in the Early Harappan – Mature Harappan Transition (2600 – 2500 BC) and extends to the early period of the second millennium. R.S. Bisht, the Director of the Dholavira excavations, had defined seven periods of occupation, or stages of the site.

The first two fall within the Early Harappan – Mature Harappan, and the final two stages are post Harappan. The radiocarbon method does not seem to work well at Dholavira, so the chronology for the site is an estimate put together using comparative methods.

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The houses there were built of moulded bricks. The pioneers know the art of copper working, bead making and masonry and were careful planners of their architecture. The settlement of Stage I was located in the vicinity of the citadel and was surrounded by a very substantial fortification, which was 11 meters thick at its base. Stage II saw the widening and strengthening of the fortification wall and the enlargement of the settlement with construction to the north. The only fortification wall was found to be plastered on the sides, and parts of it were covered with a veneer of stone. At this stage, the inhabitants displayed an affinity for brightly coloured plasters, which are still preserved in the fortification wall of Stage II.

The use of the bright plaster continues through Stage III, then it is discontinued. The material culture of stages I and II is similar, but there was an increased number of antiquities that were recovered in excavation. During Stage III, Dholavira grew from a small settlement to a large town or city with two sets of fortifications, separate districts, and a water storage system of significant scale. This period marks the raising of the Citadel and Bailey. Painted Indus black or red ware pottery and small finds, including square Indus stamp reals, allow us to date this stage to the early Mature Harappan. Some of the stamp seals from Stage III at Dholavira do not bear Indus writing, but animal derives are present. They could represent the early conventions of Indus seal making.

Stage III saw the clearing, levelling and pairing of an old Stage II residential area. This created an expanse of open ground that historians believe was a ceremonial ground. During Stage III, the inhabitants of Dholavira invested heavily in several types of hydraulic facilities. Stage IV can be thought of as the middle Mature Harappan. The city was carefully maintained, including the monumental gateways, fortification walls and the drainage system. Of special note in Stage IV is the now famous inscription of ten large signs of the Harappan script found face-down in a chamber of the North gate.

All the classic Mature Harappan objects including pottery, reels with writing, tools, loads and weights and other items of gold copper, stone, shell and clay are found in abundance in Stage IV.

Stage V is the beginning of the decline of the city. The urban core, Citadel and Bailey, were not maintained. In contrast to this, the material culture of Dholavira, for e.g. the ceramics and reels, continue in their classic Mature Harappan forms and styles. There was a temporary desertion of the site apparently for a few decades.

The following Stage VI presents the Harappan cultural tradition in a form that is widely seen in Saurashtra. The once grand city shrank to a small settlement centered on the Bailey and Castle and the southern portion of the middle town, where a wall of inferior construction was built. The houses show little continuity with earlier buildings and are laid out on a different plan. This represents the transformations and devolution of the Indus Civilization, with strong links to the late South Harappan and little contact with Sindh.

Stage VI comes to an end after about a century, with the second abandonment of the settlement. The duration of the second abandonment is not known. Dholavira is a splendid ancient city, filled with architectural achievements that were certainly not anticipated.

6. Lothal

The ancient site of Lothal was a tour of the Indus Civilization. The name could be interpreted to mean ‘mound of the dead man’, the same as Mohenjodaro. Lothal was

discovered by S.R. Rao of the ASI in1954 who excavated there in the following periods: 1954-55 to 1959-60 and in 1961-62, 1962-63.

Lothal is located near the head of the Gulf of Cambay in Gujarat, in the south-eastern part of the Indus Civilization that would have been a frontier with India. Lothal is in the southern-most of all the Sindhi-Harappan settlements.

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Rao has claimed that Lothal was a port town of the Indus Civilization, a center of maritime commerce linking ancient India with Mesopotamia. Some scholars postulate that the large, brick-lined enclosure on the eastern side of the settlement was a dockyard or harbour for ships involved in commerce, but this has been disputed by others, including Thor Heyerdahl. Most archaeologists feel that this enclosure was an ordinary tank for the storage of water.

Fig. 1.10 *A Well at Lothal, Gujarat*

Fig. 1.11 *Lothal City*

The settlement was divided into three districts—an acropolis, a lower town, and the brick-lined enclosure.

On the summit of the elevated mound is a building identified as a warehouse, as well as a long building with bathing facilities and other structures of baked brick, a striking feature of the Indus architecture.

The elevated portion of the site was also provided with a baked-brick lined well, a drain and soak jars to take water from a building, the use of which has not been

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determined as yet. These are all characteristic Sindh-Harappan traits.

To the north of this elevated platform, were the domestic quarters of the town, with private houses. No formal market facilities have been documented. The western lower town was a manufacturing area, only a small part of which was excavated.

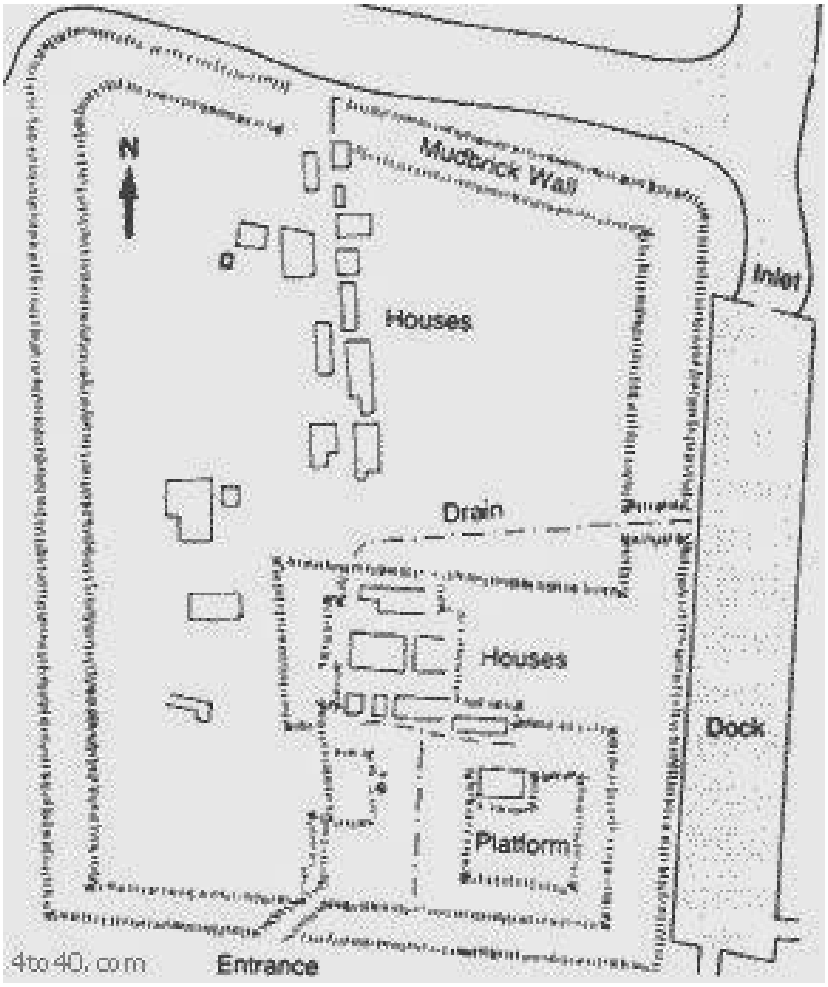

Fig. 1.12 *Lothal Dock Yard*

Lothal was a center of craftsmanship. The excavation revealed finished products and waste material from a wide range of natural resources: Copper, bronze, gold, carnation, jasper, rock crystal and other precious stones, ivory and shell. Many of these materials were associated with a bead-making shop similar to the installation at Chanhu-daro. Beads broken in the process of manufacturing and the drills used, are the same as those used at Mohenjodaro, Mehagarah and Shahr-i Sokhta in Seistan.

Typical Indus seals were found at Lothal, most of which were classics. A number of more provincial glyptic objects were present as well. Perhaps the most important of these was a Dilmun-type seal, which was a surface find.

The terracotta figurines of both humans and animals are simple, even crude, unlike those from Mohenjodaro or Harappa. Five examples were found of miniature animals: Bull, hare, dog, and a bird headed pin. The remainder of the material inventory includes typical Indus weights, triangular terracotta cakes, model terracotta carts and baked bricks. Bun shaped copper ingots that were also discovered, have parallels in Western Asia, but the metal implements are purely Indus in character.

A small country to the north-west of the site contained a number of interments, twenty of which were opened.

7. Kalibangan

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Kalibangan, also known as Pilibangan, is another well-known Indus settlement. It is a two-period site with a Sothi-Siswal and Mature Harappan occupation. In Kalibangan, we find an inscription scratched on a pot with one sign cutting another in such a way that it is certain that the writing is from left to right.

Field ploughed in two sets of furriness at right angles to each other have also been discovered at the south-west of the town wall. The Sothi-Siswal settlement is surrounded by a wall approximately 250 by 170 metre in length. The first phase of the wall was made of mud bricks laid to a thickness of approximately 1.90 metre. A second phase of construction brought the thickness of this wall to three or four meters, varying from place to place. The inner and outer faces of the 'fortifications' were plastered with mud. Only one entrance, at the north-west corner, was discovered; other entrances were probably destroyed by the late Harappans.

Direct evidence of cultivation was found in the form of a preserved ploughed field, about 100 meters to the South of the Period I settlement. It was covered by remains from the Sothi-Siswal occupation and consisted of alternating furrows and hummers in the earth. There were oriented in the cardinal directions and have a close ethnographic parallel in modern Rajasthan's agricultural practices.

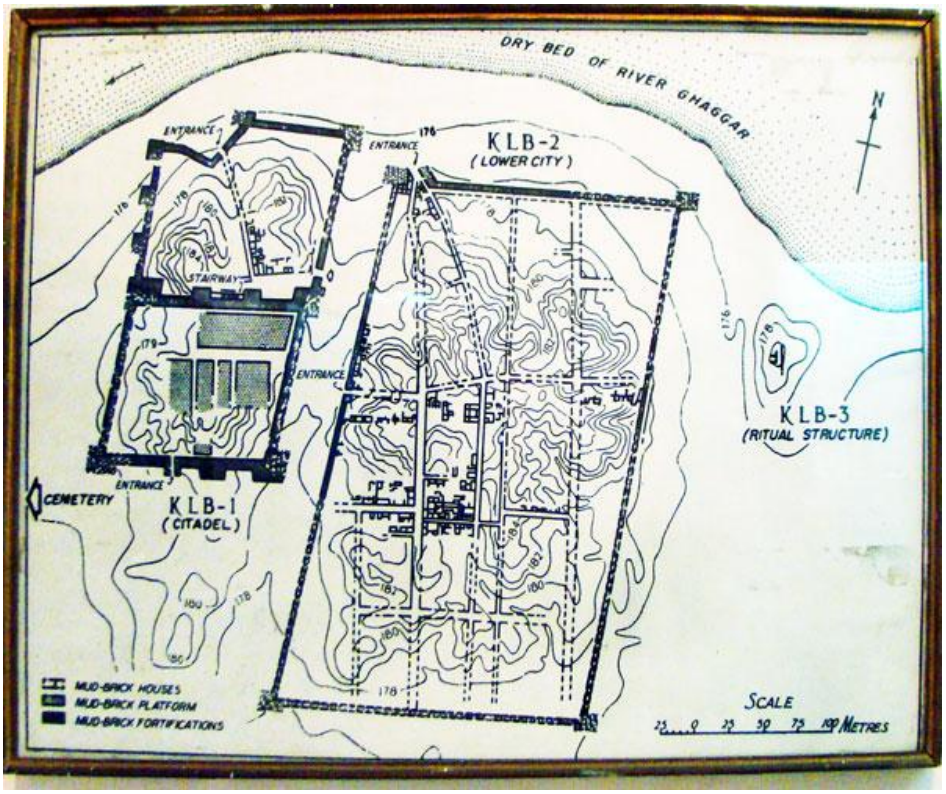

Fig. 1.13 *Site Plan of Kalibangan*

When the Indus people reoccupied Kalibangan, their ceramics included many of the shapes and fabrics of the Period I occupation. During Period II, the high mound was well fortified although the southern half was stronger than the north. The southern half

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of the high mound was equipped during Indus times with a series of mud-brick platforms on which 'ritual structures' were constructed. They are oval, plain, and sunken in the ground, and lined with mud-plaster or bricks.

Most of the people lived in the lower town of Kalibangan. It was surrounded by a fortification wall. The wall had three or four phases of construction, and it, like the high mound, was plastered with mud and tapered from bottom to top. The fortifications protected the town, which was laid out is a grid-iron plan, separating different blocks of habitation. There were four streets running the full north-south distance of the settlement.

A significant number of Indus stamp seals and readings were found at Kalibangan, including examples of both union and zebu motifs. A cylinder seal is of particular note. There is a small mound about seventy-five metres to the east of the lower town at Kalibangan. This has been designated as a 'ritual structure'. Excavation showed a mud-brick structure enclosing fire altars much like the ones on the high mound at the site.

Kalibangan is one of the rare Mature Harappan sites with a true double mound layout similar to Mohenjodaro. It is strategically placed at the confluence of the Saraswati and Drishadvathi rivers and must have played a major role as a station to monitor overland communications of the Harappan people.

8. Kulli

Kulli is a mound of about eleven hectares at the eastern end of the Kolwa Valley in southern Baluchistan. The mound rises a few meters above the valley floor. Sir Aurel Stain conducted a small excavation at Kulli during his 1927-28 exploration of Credrosia. There are no radiocarbon dates for this site, but dates from other sites with Kulli remains (Nindowari and Niai Buthi) indicate that it was contemporary with the Indus Civilization. This dating is sustained by similarities in Kulli material to those of the Mature Harappan.

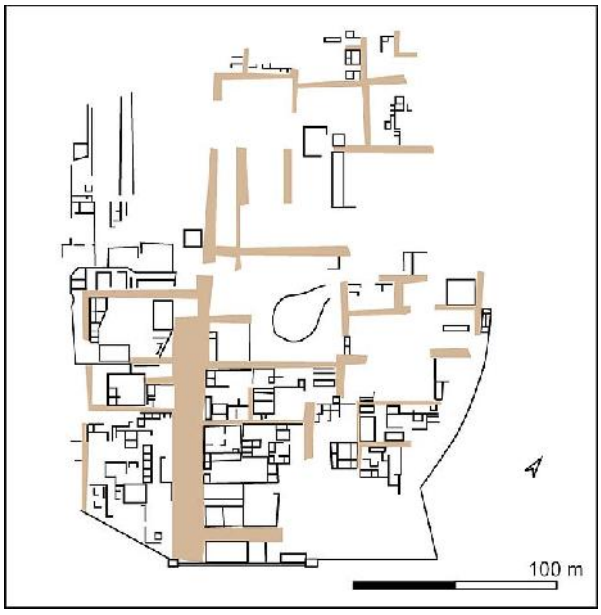

Fig. 1.14 *Kasota Qilla Mound, Kulli*

Kulli pottery includes many vessel forms identical to those of the Indus Civilization: dishes on stands, 'graters', some jars, and large storage vessels. There is also a great deal of purely Mature Harappan plain red colour on the Kulli site. However, the Kulli

painting style, especially with the wide-eyed animals and fish motifs, is distinctive. Kulli's complexity represents the highland expressions of the Harappan Civilization.

9. Sutkagendor

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The westernmost Indus site is Sutkagendor, located in the Dasht valley of Makran. It is near the western of the Dasth and its confluence with a smaller stream known as the Gajo Kaur. It is forty-two kilometres from the sea along the Dasht River route. Sutakagendor was discovered in 1875 by Major E-Macklor, who conducted a small excavation there. As a part of his Gedrosia tour, Stain came in 1928 and conducted a small excavation. Dales was at Sutkhagendor from 7th-20th October 1960, as a part of his Makran survey.

Stain found structures outside the northern wall of the enclosure, and there were other remains on the eastern side of the site, possibly only to the north. He found 'cinerary deposits one above the other'. The uppermost depiction proved to consist of two pots, one stuck in the other.

Dales unearthed a structure built against the western fortification wall. This was made of both stone and mud bricks, some of the latter being rather large (fifty centimetres long) and made without straw. A trench area near the eastern fortification wall demonstrated that the inner face of the wall was vertical. It is estimated that the outer wall at this point would have been 7.5 metres thick at the base.

Stain noted the high number of flint blades, 127 of them, upto 27.5 centimetres long, but with no cores. Stone vessels—one for example in alabaster—were found. Arrowheads in both chipped stone and copper-bronze were also found. The copper-bronze examples have parallels at Mohenjodaro. Stain also noted the abundance of worked-shell and a five onyx bead. The pottery is typical Indus red ware in the usual shapes, including the dish-on-stand and black-on-red painted wares. Absence of square stamp seals of Mature Harappan style along with figurines, beads faience and clay balls have been noted by Dales and other archaeologists.

Sutkagendor is more or less a pure Sindhi-Harappan site in the Kulli domain. There is no Kulli pottery mentioned in the reports of the site. It was not a part of the Indus Civilization, since it is so far from the sea but, it may have played a role in commerce between the Indus Civilization and the West.

10. Rojdi

Rojdi is another well-known settlement of the Indus Civilization. It is strategically situated in the geographical center of Saurashtra, on the banks of the Bhadar River. It is the regional centre of the Indus Civilization, one of the well known south Harappan places.

Two large excavation areas have been created at Rojdi, the south extension and the main mound. There was also a systematic excavation at an outer gateway and at an isolated structure on the northern slope of the site. All of this has been very finely preserved.

The people of Rojdi built their houses with mud walls. No bricks were found, baked or otherwise, in the excavations. No wells, bathing platforms, and associated street drains, like those found at Lothal, Mohenjodaro and Harappa were found either.

11. Chanu-daro

Chanhu-daro is one of the best-known settlements of the Indus Civilization. Today, it is a group of three low mounds that excavation has found to be parts of a single settlement

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estimated to have been approximately five hectares in size. It was excavated by Majumdar in March 1930 and again during the winter field season of 1935-36 by Mackay.

The Indus occupation had buildings of baked bricks, paved bathrooms and a civic drainage system that 'was as well thought out and doubtless, quite as effective as that of the larger city (Mohenjodaro)'. Some buildings were grouped along a wide street that ran north-west to south-west but was cut by at least one thoroughfare coming in at a right angle. This attention to town planning wasn't seen in the upper most Indus levels.

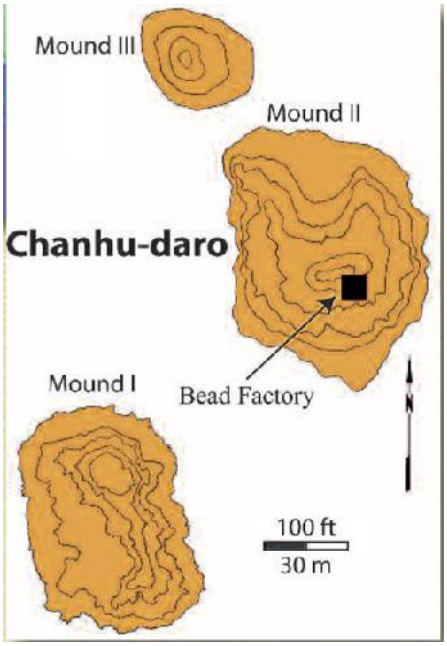

Fig. 1.15 (a) *Different-Wounds of Chanhu-daro*

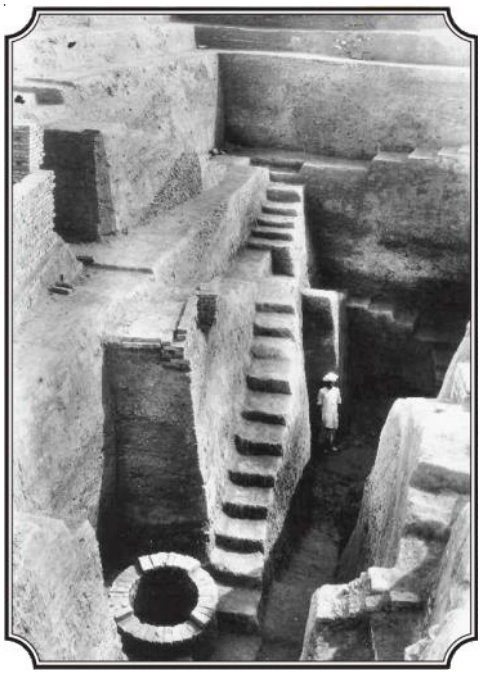

Fig. 1.15 (b) *The Great Cutting at Chanhu-daro*

A bead factory and furnace are the most interesting features of this occupation. The furnace was used in several ways, 'including the glazing of steatite, priding heat to bring out the red colour of carnelian and preparing stone for better clipping, also a part of the bead-making process'.

There are two copper-bronze toy vehicles from Chanhu-daro. The human figurines are very much like those at Mohenjodaro. Chanhu-daro seems to have a greater number of bird figurines than other Mature Harappan sites. Perhaps the most interesting figurines are the bulls with single horns and true unicorns.

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1.6 ART AND SCULPTURE

The study of the art of the Indus Civilization has not been fully developed, making it one of the most important areas of improvement, in terms of scholarship, for this civilization. There is a modest amount of human sculptures from the Indus sites, mainly Harappa and Mohenjodaro. But there are no examples of life-size works of art from the Indus Civilization.

The Harappan culture and its symbolic world were peopled by animals, often untamed ones. Bones of wild animals occur at town sites and numerous clay representations have also been found. Also, the best glyptic art, is the carving on stone seals that represent animals. For a glimpse at the Harappan artistic expression, we begin with representations of nature, animals in particular. Some pottery depicts foliage, the strutting peacock or domesticated deer with its head turned back towards a stylized tree.

Carvings of animals in intaglios reverse relief on the steatite seals are often superbly executed. The tiger, elephant, rhinoceros and bull are the most widely rendered of all animals. Three dimensional representation is in clay and faience and to a lesser extent, in stone and bronze. We may also note that to the exception of a few seals, mainly from Mohenjodaro, Kalibangan and Harappa and a few pointed parts, artistic representation is overwhelmingly of single subjects or animals or birds rather than that of 'scenes' or narratives.

Animal figurines are often of rough workmanship and careless in detail like the misjudgement of the length of an animal's tail. Many are made of clay and faience. Rams and squirrels are frequently made of faience and are small enough to be used as amulets. The rough hide of a Lothal horse compares favourably with figures from Mohenjodaro; although the fleece is not depicted, the horses are well-modelled. There are no figurines of the domestic cat or cow. We have also found a buffalo in bronze about seven centimetres long, and a bronze goat on a long projection with twisted horns both being miniatures. They were found in Mohenjodaro, the former, specifically, was found in the Citadel.

1.6.1 Human Sculpture: The Red Jasper Male Torso

One of the best known art objects and also the most controversial from an Indus site is the Red Jasper Torso found by Vats at Harappa during the 1928-29 period. The find was made in the vicinity of the circular brick threshing floors to the south of the Great Granary and was ascribed by Vats to Stratum, the modern period 3C.

Check Your Progress

3. What are the principal regions of the Indus Civilization?
4. Who authored the book The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective?
5. Where is Ganweriwala, an Indus site, located?
6. Who has claimed that Lothal was a port town of the Indus Civilization?

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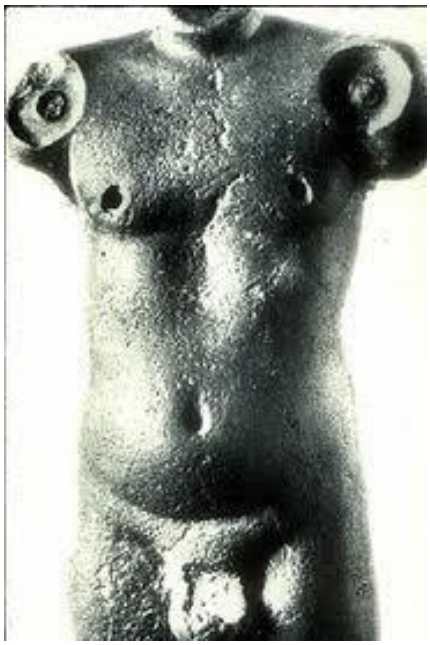

Fig. 1.16 *Red Torso from Harappa*

The piece is 9.5 centimetres high, broken at the legs with both the head and arms missing. It is a striking frontal nude. The genitals seem to have been carefully modelled, although they have been defaced. This torso was carved in a natural, well rounded way with the refined and wonderful truthful modelling of the body parts.

There are holes for the attachment of the head and the arms but none are apparent for the legs. Prominent circular indentations, probably made by a tube drill, are located on the front of each shoulder. Their function is unknown, but it has been suggested that they could be related to the way a garment might have been affixed to the original sculpture or for the inlay of ornaments. Vats insisted from the beginning that the piece should be attributed to the Mature Harappan. According to Marshall, 'They are, without exception, archaic, crude and lacking in anatomical detail and the work of the sculpture is possession of an advanced technique.'

1.6.2 Gray Stone Torso of a Dancer

The broken torso of a male dancing figure, made of dark grey stone, has been found by D. R. Sahani during his excavation at Harappa. This torso is 9.9 centimeters high, with the head, arms and legs all missing. Much of the sculpture from Mohenjodaro was described just as it was excavated, in the preliminary reports that were published annually throughout the field season of 1936-37.

The legs are broken but there are holes for arms and for the head. It is posed as a dancer, the right leg of the image is firmly fixed but the left leg is lifted in movement. Holes are made on the back of the neck to probably hold hair. It seems that the face is looking directly at the ground. The torso is excellently twisted which gives the expression of movement.

Wheeler disputed the period of its construction. Wheeler shared Marshall's view that this sculpture has some peculiar historical links with the Dancing Shiva. But it is a credible interpretation of the dancing figure. Definitely this sculpture is full of life and spirit and could be placed at the zenith of Indus art.

Fig. 1.17 *Gray Stone Dancing Sculpture from Harappa*

1.7 ART AND CRAFT

Indus Civilization had a very vast field of crafts. Different techniques were used to produce various objects which were considered to be precious or uncommon. The production of crafts made a major contribution to the agro-pastoral and craft-producing economy and contributed to the overall expansion of diversity in production. Documentation of these crafts has been a topic of long-standing interest in Harappan studies.

Among the factors considered for specific specializations in this field, are the natural resources used in manufacturing and the level of skill and technical knowledge required to produce objects from a given raw material. But here we will discuss the raw materials and the produced goods. Producing ceramics was one of the most basic and one of the most important utilitarian crafts. Ceramics served a variety of functions that included acting as containers for liquid and dry food and aiding in storage and transport of products over long distances. Among the 100 plus varieties of pots known from Harappan contents, majority were used for ordinary pursuits like cracking, serving, eating and bathing.

Natural clays were readily available in most regions of the civilization. A variety of techniques were required to decorate their pottery in colorful and exotic ways by employing a limited range of pigments, some of which may have been procured from some distance, while others were locally available in water sediments. In addition to using clays for vessels, the Harappans produced many body ornaments from clay amongst which arm bangles were the most ubiquitous. Beads and bangles were made from a variety of materials that required different levels of technical expertise. Simple terracotta bangles were produced by forming narrow strips of clay and firing them. Stoneware bangle production was truly innovative because it took advantage of known techniques such as relating and processing specially refined clays and reduction firing. With minimal changes, potters altered conditions in kilns and created an entirely new product.

Fig. 1.18 *Different Ornaments*

1.8 RELIGION AND ART

Art is always religious in nature. The life in the Indian Harappan Civilization was closely linked to natural powers, and this link is revealed in several artifacts and remains. John Marshall was a pioneer historian who worked on the religious beliefs and activities of this civilization. In the context of Harappan Civilization, religion can be defined as an institution developed to honour the world of deities, the principles of which are believed to be true by the adherents and it could not be proved or disproved. No doubt, every resident of this civilization had very sophisticated religious beliefs.

Fig. 1.19 *Terracotta Figurine of Female Goddess: Matri Devi*

1.8.1 Human Figurines

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The terracotta human figurines of Mature Harappan phase varied in style, size and theme. There are three types of figurines: Male, female and those of indeterminate gender.

Many other figurines are discovered with exaggerated collars. Others from Mohenjodaro have tightly fitted neck rings or *chokers*. There is a possibility that there could have been a community in Mohenjodaro which considered long necks as a mark of beauty and for achieving the same, they practiced artificial means.

Fig. 1.20 *Terracotta Female Figurines*

A very common and omnipresent figurine of the female goddess, Matri Devi, is found in most Indus sites. Terracotta female figurines were made either in the form of a toy or for offerings or perhaps as cult images for household shrines.

Marshall found broad parallels with the mother goddess cult in Baluchistan (the north-west frontier, modern day Pakistan).

The evidence for mother goddesses in Harappan Civilization is not robust and they might be multifunctional. The peculiar point is this that female sexuality is deeply engrained in this religion and ideology, and attention is paid to this point.

The evidence for male gods is less ambiguous. Sir John Marshall found a striking resemblance of Indus female figurines to cult images used in household shrines of modern villages of India with which he was familiar. Marshall's view complemented a widespread belief of 'Matri Devi' (Nature Goddess or Fertility Goddess). This idea was based on so called 'Stage Theories' in which societies were believed to have progressed from a matriarchal society instead of a male dominated patriarchal society.

The discovery of female terracotta figurines in different parts of Asia and Europe confirms this concept. The worship of female goddesses associated with fertility has long been held as a significant characteristic of Harappa primarily because agricultural

societies are invariably known to have an association with fertility. Few representations on the seals are also relevant.

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Fig. 1.21 *Female Figurine with a Fan Shaped Head*

Another interesting seal which represents a nude woman, head bent with her legs apart and a tree (or plant) coming out from her vagina, is interpreted as a prototype of Devi Shakambhari (The Earth Mother). The attributes of figurines and the scenarios in which they were revealed have to be considered with care before assigning them religious value.

It might be possible that some of the female figurines may have had religious value and few of them belonged to household rituals, or were a means of amusement like a toy or a decorative item.

Recent studies show that there is a great variety and difference in the form of female figurines. The most common female figurine which seems to have religious significance is a female figure with a distinctive fan shaped headdress, wearing a short skirt, ornamented with necklaces, anklets, bangles, earrings, armlets, etc. Some of the figurines have cup shaped attachments on either side of the head. In some cases, the cup like attachments have traces of black residue, suggesting that they were used to burn oil for lighting. Such sort of figurines might be religious sculptures which were worshipped in houses votive used for offerings made to a deity, or part of the paraphernalia of domestic rituals.

Matronly and pot bellied type of female figurine is also found which may represent a pregnant woman or a rich woman. This figurine is naked and sometimes, is found wearing some jewellery and a turban or headdress. One resemblance in both figurines is that they both carry a baby in their arms. The matronly figurine can stand without any support. Female figurines related to religious beliefs have been found in large numbers at several sites like Banawali, Mohenjodaro and Harappa but surprisingly not at sites such as Mitathal, Surkotada, Kalibangan or Lothal.

Fig. 1.22 *Phalanx*

Many terracotta figurines were found in poor condition, meaning in broken form and discarded, in secondary locations. No architect or building has been found which can be regarded as a temple. That is why Sir John Marshall regarded these images as votive offerings rather than cult structures. The breaking of these figurines suggests that they were a part of ritual cycles and were made for short-term use on some specific occasion. It is yet to be specified if there existed a relationship between the female, male and animal figurines.

Another aspect of this kind of fertility related beliefs of the Indus people was the worship of male and female stone icons which are known as Linga and Yonis (representing the male and female sexual organs respectively). Marshall identified such objects but later on George Dales argued that the context in which these stones were cannot assure us about its cultic significance. He proposed that such structures could be for architectural use; either to guide masons in pillar building or to measure angles or they could even be useful for astronomical practices. Marshall himself suggested that some objects might be grinders or unfinished weights, a claim which supports the assumptions of Dales. However, recently terracotta objects resembling the Linga and the Yoni were found in Kalibangan.

Fig. 1.23 *Different Female Figurines*

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The figurines and narratives depicted on the seals continue to be the centre of argument for and against such interpretations. Their direct relationship to the Indian subcontinent remains ambiguous, keeping in view the great time gap between the last vestiges of the Harappan Civilization and the emergence of Brahman-ism and other cults. It could be possible that later religions borrowed or revived the imagery of the Indus culture but the meanings attached to them are unlikely to have remained the same. Even then, it is still difficult to prove this fact because of the great time lag in between the Indus Civilization and prototypical Brahman-ism or Buddhism. In order to establish the plausibility of such assumptions, it is required that one explains how they could have reflected identical ideals after over a thousand years of intervening history.

Kulli Human Figurines

The figurines from the Kulli domain have a distinctive look which gives a new dimension to the cultural diversity of that period. The Kulli folk made figurines of several kinds but they focused on painted bulls, animals and humans.

The Ithyphallic Males

After many years post the discovery of the Harappan Civilization, Dales, through his research paper, proved that there was a link between the Indus Civilization and the Mesopotamian civilization which included dice and male figurines. Very similar objects have been found at Chanhu-daro and at Nippur.

Small hand-made terracotta figurines of potbellied, naked males with an height of not more than twelve centimetres with attached legs have been found. The sexual organs are broken though, the gender of the representation is certain. In fact, they look to be in an ithyphallic state. The figurines from both Indus and Mesopotamia, have the remnants of small tails.

Such figurines are also found at Lothal and Mohenjodaro but not at Harappa. Interestingly, the clay used for the figurines of the two places is totally different. The Chanhu-daro figurine was made of Sindhi clay and the Nippur figurine was found in Mesopotamia.

Bull was believed to be a symbol of male virility in many ancient cultures and seems to have been of particular importance. In certain sites, steatite bull statuettes have been discovered. There is a possibility of cult images (rather than toys) of terracotta animals on wheels. Two Indus seals appear to represent animals being carried in processions, one of which is similar to a bull. Semi-human animals or composite animals like bull-elephant, tiger-human, ram-bull-elephant and unicorn are depicted on seals as they may have some kind of mythological value or were in keeping with some mysterious beliefs.

Motifs such as swastika on faience, metal tablets and terracotta may have been linked with auspiciousness or protectiveness. In Mohenjodaro and Harappa, several terracotta masks and puppets were discovered which include real and mythical animals and these were perhaps used in some religious and/or political rituals.

A triangle terracotta cake discovered at Kalibangan has a carving of a horned deity on one side and on the other side it depicts an animal being dragged by a rope by

a human. The interpretation of the image is that of an animal sacrifice, a practice of those days. Instances of human sacrifices were also found in a cylindrical seal of Kalibangan which shows a woman flanked by two men holding her with one hand and raised swords over her head with the other hand. The most striking evidence suggesting ritualistic practices comes from fire altars of Kalibangan.

The religious practices which are reflected through the sculptures and seals were considered to be a mélange of influences by Wheeler. It was to Hinduism that he returned in his conclusion suggesting that the 'Harappan mentality' anticipated its later religions.

Substrate philosophy of linking the Indus religion, Brahmanism and Buddhism has been pervasive in reconstructions of the Indus Civilization and have contrived a political authority intertwined with a philosophy which is at once Hindu and Buddhist. Such interpretations have consigned the civilization to a society which could have been of homogeneous caste and in which political authority was vested in a reclusive priest class. This authority was based on an ideology in which one's social class or stage of life was the moral order and one had to fulfil the purpose for which one was given a place in the society, originally. In such a society, power lay masked behind a veil of tradition that gave it a moral base. But such interpretations are still incomplete and need more discussion.

In the absence of texts to complement this view, we cannot be assured whether this presumed system of thought represents a true reality. Association of gods and goddesses with natural phenomena and references to the supernatural and animalistic beings fall closely in line with Indus imagery and deeply expresses an impulse to break away from routine and transform the natural world into a built-world. Yet the symbolism and underlying systems of thought proposed, remain an exclusive truth that can only approximate the ideals that lingered in the minds of the people who created and preserved them.

1.9 TERRACOTTA FIGURINES

Several terracotta masks depicting faces were discovered at Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The masks were produced in moulds and contain holes on each side for fastening. The faces are composite, that is containing both human and animal like features, thereby evoking a supernatural creature. It also possesses horns and tails. Actually masks and busts of human and animals are part of the material inventory of the Mature Indus phase.

Homed imagery is common among cultures of Indus times and includes painted designs on ceramic pots. Marshall described the utility of these masks as being used for some rituals or ceremonies. There is also a representation of two devil like individuals, complete with horns, cloven feet and a pointed tail, in a posture of hailing someone. These depictions are on opposite edges of a stamp seal that has a unicorn's face and script on the two large faces.

The devil like representations come through with just enough strength and clarity to make us suppose that they were a part of the Harappan beliefs.

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Fig. 1.24 *Terracotta Masks*

Marshall emphasized the similarity of the Indus female figurines to cultic images used in household shrines in Indian villages now-a-days. Marshall's view supported a view of 20th century belief that a Mother or Nature Goddess cult spread from present day Turkey to western Asia. In antiquity such ideas were based on stage theories in which societies were believed to have progressed from matriarchal societies in which women led and dominated societies to male dominated patriarchal society. The Indus images credited with the function of scored images in some kind of Mother Goddess sect.

What is most significant about Marshall's view is the attribution of specific meaning of Indus artifacts to gods known in contemporary south Asian religions. Marshall said that the seals, figurines and masks only provide evidence for the most popular side of Hindu religious practices and not for philosophical concepts.

1.9.1 People, Plants and Animals in Indus Art

In the Indus Civilization, many plants and animals are depicted in different manner and form. Some of them were related to their day-to-day life and some of them were exotic.

In day-to-day life, depictions were associated with cattle, sheep and goats. Strikingly some animals are missing in Indus art and archaeology, like lions, even though they were definitely present in the Indus region.

Flora was an essential part of the Indus imagery but only a few species can be identified. For instance, water lilies and Peepal can be recognized. There are many interesting and comparatively large reclining caprids in the Harappa civilization. They are found at Mohenjodaro.

There are numerous kinds of animals in the art of Indus. Elephants, humped bulls, tigers, water buffalos, zebras, rhinoceros were enormously popular depictions on seals. Some special styles and features of animals made in this civilization are peculiar. For instance, unicorn with elephant trunks. This is an exception.

Check Your Progress

7. Who found the broken torso of a male dancing figure at Harappa?
8. Name the female goddess whose figurines are found in most Harappan sites.

Fig. 1.25 *A Seal Depicting Composition of Unicorn with Elephant Trunks*

Motif in the later phase of Indus Art

Moving from head to bottom, a human-like face and an elephant's trunk hanging from the chin. Based on seals, the rear of the body may have been tiger stripes, sometimes only the rear legs are treated this way. The back legs are not cow-like. In a seal, the tail is raised and looks something like a scorpion tail with a stinger at the end.

Human representation is a very popular and common form of Indus art which could be as simple as a headdress while others may be representations of the Harappan belief of humans with horns as seen on several seals. In a seal, the image of women fighting with a horned tiger can be seen too and due to pendulous breasts it is not difficult to determine the sex.

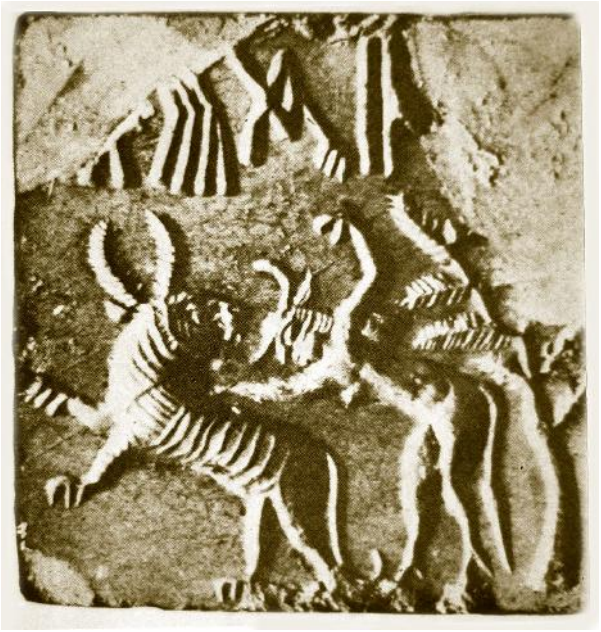

Fig. 1.26 *Seal of Horned Female Cow Bat with Horned Tiger*

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Cakes found at Kalibangan in triangular shape are made of terracotta and also have significant artistic value. One side has a human with a tethered animal. The face of the cake has a horned human with what can be imagined as a plant issuing out of the top of his or her head.

Fig. 1.27 *Terracotta Rhinoceros*

Fig. 1.28 *Terracotta Bull*

The sculptures discovered till date do not represent the original art and creativity as they were mostly done in stone and terracotta and were very simple in nature. One

of the reasons behind this is that the Indus people mostly used wood for making sculptures which is not durable as we can see in our finding of the later phases of Indus art. Reasons behind the lowest occurrence of stone sculptures may be the lack of availability of stone in nearby sites. Most of the sculptures were found in broken form and so Mackay estimated they could be a part of their ritual cycle.

1.9.2 Human Sculpture: The Priest or King

A bust of a male figure was discovered at Mohenjodaro by Dikslit in 1925-26 (Figure 1.29).

The piece can be attributed to the late period of Mohenjodaro. It is broken at the bottom and the height is only ten centimetres. It is not of imposing size and the posture is static and formal and often in a particular seated position. The formality of priest king bust can be marked by the carving of the mouth, ears and beard.

A toga like garment is draped over the left shoulder and under the right arm. The garment is covered under in trefoil manner. This kind of foil design is also found in Mesopotamia and Central Asia.

The trefoil is interspersed with an occasional circle. The trefoils and circles are left roughened on the interior, to allow a red paste filling to adhere. One hole is present below each ear to hold the necklace. The back of the head is smoothed according to Mackay but it was broken. It could be possible that the sculpture was intended to be placed in a niche with a slope or that this unseen portion of the work was created to allow it to sit farther back than it could have with a full head of hair. The hair style is quite interesting.

The nose is straight and broken and it does not seem to have dominated the face. The unusual eyes look partially closed or hooded. According to Mackay, the eyes are not in the typical eastern style. Half closed eyes concentrated on the top of the nose, proclaim that this creature is a yogi. The ears are fashioned rather crudely as simple 'C' shapes which are characteristic of Indus sculpture. They are out of place with respect to the other physical features of the priest king which are far more sophisticated in their representation. The hair is divided in the middle and kept in place by a band. The band contains a circular ornament which had some religious significance. There is no bun of hair at the back of head. The beard is closely cropped. Some scholars suggest that there is moustache also but the upper lip is to have been shaved. In Mesopotamian art also, moustaches were absent in sculpture.

Some scholars believe that the priest king may not be a finished work. The stone of the upper lip has been left slightly thicker than the cheek. The lip is thus, on the some plane as the beard, but no attempt was made to portray the moustache hair. The raised moustache area is smooth and it looks like for some reason the artisan stopped working prior to carving the moustache hair. Similar assumptions can be made where the beard meets the skin on the face. The instrument used to create the beard hair lines strayed across the raised boundary for the beard and disfigured the cheek. These stray work lines were not smoothed away, as they would have been in a fully finished work.

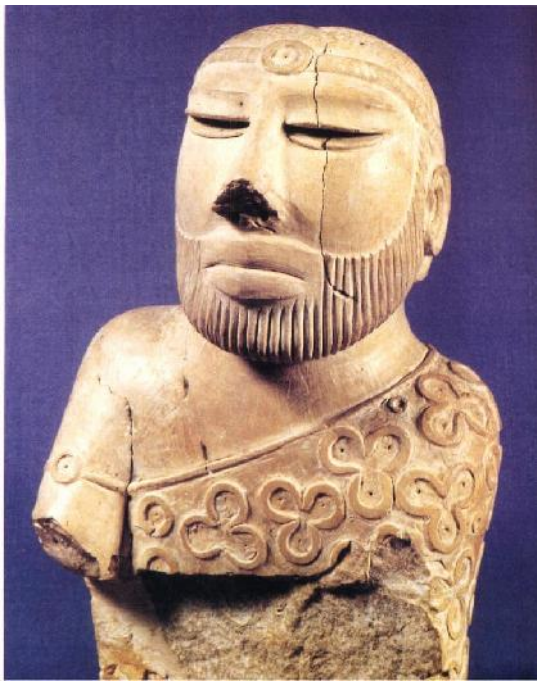

Fig. 1.29 *Priest King of Mohenjodaro*

Priest or King

Mackay was the person who identified the sculpture shown in Figure 1.29 as a priest. Marshall mentioned this as a possible priest king; a notion perfectly in line with his vision of the Indus Civilization. In ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, rulers were portrayed in good number in sculptures and stone relief but there is very little similarity with this Harappan sculpture. The person portrayed was either a priest or a king or someone who held both positions in Indus life. Ardeleanu Jansen declared this figure as a seated man. Parpola tried to demonstrate that the robe of the priest king is something called the 'tarpya' found in Vedic rituals and is said to be the garment of the Divine King Varuna. Parpola postulated that the sculpture is a representation of a seated deity, who has an elaborate, changeable headdress of the type, he proposes, is found on the proto Shiva seal.

1.9.3 The Stern Man

During the excavation at Mohenjodaro, Mackay found a sculpture in 1926–27. It is made of yellow limestone. The head is 19.7 centimetres high and beardless. This image is thought to be a male based on the way in which the hair is shown. The hair is arranged in a bun at the back, held in place by a fillet extending around from the front. The handling of the hair bun is very similar on both pieces, which helps us to easily determine the gender. Its nose is carved in a fashion not unlike the other sculpture but it is also broken. Hollow eyes which are drilled to take an inlay of some kind are also present. The bust does not have any expression. Ears are made in simple crescent shapes.

1.9.4 The Dancing Girl

The bronze dancing girl is an eye catching sculpture found in Mohenjodaro. It is considered to be the most captivating piece of art form. The figure of the woman is

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slim and naked. During excavation, in 1926–27, D.R. Sahni found this precious bronze sculpture. Its height is 10.8 centimeters and it was made by the lost wax process. This is a technique in which the desired form is modelled in clay and then coated with wax. It is, then, covered with an outer layer of clay, with one or more apertures piercing it. Molten bronze is pound through the latter and the wax evaporates, allowing the bronze to coat the clay core and then the outer layer of clay is finally broken and discarded.

The dancing girl must have been a part of larger objects. The image is of a very young and slim woman standing upright, with her head tilted slightly backwards and her left leg bent at the knee. The limbs are disproportionately long, and the left hand curls to make a large cavity in which a pole or a rod could have been inserted. There is a little sense of flesh on the body or anatomy of the joints which is a stylistic feature followed by several Indian sculptures. Her thick and long hair are aesthetically coiled into a bun at the back of her neck. Her right arm is bent with her hand placed on the back of her hip, the thumb resting outside a clenched fist. The thumb and forefinger of the right hand form a circle to hold any small object.

Although she is naked except for some adornments but many have pointed out that the piece is innocent rather than erotic considering the gentle curve of the back and the hips. Around her neck, a small necklace with three large pendant beads rests. On her left arm, she is wearing almost twenty five bangles which would have prohibited the mobility of the elbow. On her right arm, she has four bangles, two at the wrist and two above the elbow. Her hairstyle is similar to how Indian women wear their hair today.

There is a debate about this sculpture: A dancer or someone else? If she was a dancer, it would foreshadow later Indian sculptures, which are much influenced by this theme.

Some scholars believe that large lips and broad hips of the dancing girl can be used to indicate a racial affiliation—Dravidian, Nubian or Baluchi Proto Australoid. Phenotypic traits of such an artistic sculpture are difficult to interpret and she might also be a typical representation of the Indus people.

Fig. 1.30 *Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro: Front and Rear View*

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John Marshall referred to this image as 'a small figurine of rather rough workmanship but gives a vivid impression of the young aboriginal nautch girl with her hand on hip in half impudent posture, and legs slightly forward as she beats time to the music with her legs and feet. The modeling of the back, hips and buttocks is quite effective'. Marshall also noted that there was certainly a youthful superiority, self confidence and even arrogance in the figurine. In his autobiography, Wheeler accepted this figure as his favourite statuette.

1.9.5 A Second Bronze Girl

A very similar piece from Mohenjodaro was found by Mackay in 1930–31, in his final session of excavation. It is also small and corroded. Her right hand is positioned to show as if it could have held something and the left is full of bangles.

Due to its stiff and straight body however, it does not have the charm of the first dancing girl. Some historians called this statuette as the ugly sister. No significant context has been recorded for either of these bronze figures.

1.10 SEALS

Seals are well-known objects throughout the Indus and contemporary cultures in the near East, in Southern Mesopotamia and at Tramin sites. They are 'hallmark artifacts' of the civilization. Indus seals are broadly distributed at both large and small Harappan settlements. Although they may have been used as amulets or talismans in the Harappan content, they clearly functioned as a kind of 'signature' or marker of identification. Seal production was widespread throughout the Indus valley, since there are unfinished seals which were recovered at large and small sites.

Fig. 1.31 *Different Indus Seals*

There are several different inscribed objects that fall into the category of seals and sealing devices. At Mohenjodaro, 7.5% of the 1501 seals discovered until 1938 were square and depicted a single animal or hybrid creature. Other seal impressions or seals with Indus motifs are found at sites near Mesopotamia.

1.10.1 The Male God: Pashupati

A seal found by Mackay depicts a yogi who is in meditation and surrounded by some animals. Marshall identified this image as 'Proto Shiva'. He declared this image as the forerunner of the consummate Hindu deity.

This steatite seal was found at Mohenjodaro during 1928-29 and is usually referred to as the Pashupati seal. It shows a male figure with a buffalo horn headdress seated on a dais with his legs bent double under him, heels together, toes pointing downwards, his outstretched arms covered with bangles and hands resting tightly on his knees, thumbs out.

Marshall described this figure as being in the attitude of a practitioner of yoga.

The male is surrounded by four animals—rhinoceros, elephant, water buffalo and tiger. There are two antelopes beneath the dais. There is a claim or belief that the figure on the seal is three faced and the lower limbs are bare and the phallus, seemingly exposed, means ithyphallic (with an erect penis). But it is possible that what appears to be the phallus is, in reality, the end of the waistband. The head of the male figure is surrounded by a pair of large horns, meeting in the centre of the headdress. These horns are those of water buffaloes, with the ribbing clearly depicted. Animals presented in such a manner are similar to other Indus seals.

Fig. 1.32 *Seal Depicting Male God Pashupati*

Marshall considered this image as the Hindu deity Pashupati Shiva. Although he also identified some of the male figurines and terracotta masks with this god, he considered the particular image on this seal and those that were reproduced on several others as primary example of Proto Shiva. There are four attributes which led him to this conclusion—the figure appears to have three faces, which he interpreted as a Shiva's several characteristics, that of a three-faced god. Second, Shiva is the master of all

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animals and the four animals depicted with him: Elephant, rhinoceros, tiger and water buffalo; were interpreted by Marshall as representations of that attribute. Third, the yogic posture, feet drawn under the body and hands extended above the knees signified Shiva as a prince of yogis. Fourth, the male figure's horned headdress, an artistic convention used to represent divinity on Mesopotamian seals which Sir John Marshall linked to the Shiva of the Indus. Later on, the form of the trident was considered a special attribute of Shiva but on the other hand, this character could have been placed there for some specific reason and till the time we have not deciphered the Indus script, the issue cannot be resolved.

The name Shiva does not reveal itself before 200 BC, so before it, the Vedic god with Shiva's powers was Rudra, who possessed vigour and the ability to punish. Shiva is a great ascetic and a controller of destinies. Perhaps over time, Rudra and Shiva became one.

On the basis of the three faces, Marshall declared the figurine as Proto Shiva. But it is not entirely clear that the three faces are actually there. He tried to imagine Shiva as 'pre-eminently the Prince of Yogis', the typical ascetic and self-modifier. When his name Mahayogi became known in the course of time, the yogi came to be regarded as a miracle monger and a magician.

Apart from Shiva's Mahayogi form, he is also known as Pashupati-Lord of Beasts. In history, it was believed that it meant the master of cattle but the Vedic 'Pashu'signifies at best, the forest. In this way, the presence of wild animals on the seal appropriately follows the more ancient usage. Rudra, the Vedic God, whose cult was amalgamated and identified with that of Shiva, and who also bore the title of Pashupati, could also be the reason behind such a conception. Marshall focussed on 'Master and Mistress of Animals' of Minoan crete, but this view is not only inadequate but irrelevant now-a-days.

Marshall used other attributes present on the seals to make direct historical analogies with modern Hindu and Buddhist practices. For instance, the Peepal tree (Ficus Religiosa) schematically represented on numerous seals has great significance in Hinduism and Buddhism both. He also co-related some animals (which were portrayed on the seals) to aspects of Hinduism and Shiva, like the water buffalo with the God of Death and the dark demons of the water tiger with Mother Goddess in her destructive aspects, the elephant as the vehicle of Lord Indra or as the embodiment of good luck and the crocodile which was worshipped in certain parts of the country.

Many scholars have expressed a favorable view of Marshall's identification of the figure on the seal as Pashupati Shiva. But many other authors have also criticized Marshall's view. Sullivan Srinivasan and A. Hitterbeited discarded this opinion. Interpretations linking Indus imagery is a topic of debate. Scholars continue to stimulate varied interpretations. Piggott and Wheeler are in general agreement regarding the linking of Pashupati Shiva and the Great Mother Goddess figurines to the development of the Indus identity. Piggott confirmed that old faiths died gradually and with difficulty and that the Indus was essentially similar to the Indian form.

Several lines of evidence have been used to identify the depiction of gods, goddesses and animals as symbolic of practices known from historic South Asian religious beliefs.

1.10.2 Seal Depicting Divine Adoration

A very famous seal which depicts possibly a mnemonic of some sort, shows a goat and a kneeling human in front of a tree with a human inside it. Below it, there is a row of seven attending figures which is not the only representation with seven attending humans seen in a seal.

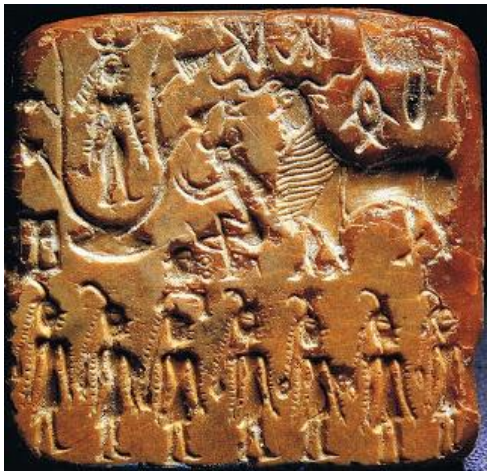

Fig. 1.33 *A Sea of Divine Adoration*

In Indian culture, the number seven has a significant value as mentioned in the Rig-Veda. The Sarasvati River is venerated as one of the seven sisters. Rigvedic geography is centred on Punjab which is known as the 'Sapt Sandhav Shetra'- the seven rivers of the region. Given the continuity of beliefs marking ancient India, it might be that the notion of seven river sisters came to Aryans' mind from the Harappan sources.

1.10.3 Animals on the Seal

In Indus ideology, animals were the most common image on Harappan seals. A steatite seal depicts animals: one is a cow or a bull; which is just another small observation that supports the idea that cattle were a source of prosperity and property. Some other portrayals are those of composite animals. Few of them were three headed tigers like Minotaur; a human torso on four legged bodies; unicorns with elephant trunks and a tiger with horns, etc.

Gilgamesh: A gospel of Mesopotamia

Two seal depictions resemble the story of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamian mythology. A seal found at Mohenjodaro shows a half-human female and a half-bull monster attacking a horned tiger. Scholars have believed that this seal shows the epic of Mesopotamia and its heroic character Gilgamesh. In the story, Goddess Aruru created a bull man monster, Enkida, to fight with Gilgamesh but who became an ally of Gilgamesh and fought with him against the beasts. Another motif depicts the combat scene with Gilgamesh fighting off wild animals. The existence of this theme in objects associated with Harappan Civilization is perfectly in sync with the notion that both contemporary civilizations had a relationship.

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Fig. 1.34 *Seal Depicting the Story of Gilgamesh*

During the excavation of Chanhu-daro, Mackay found a very different kind of an image on a seal. It reveals a short horned bull above a prostrate human figure. Mackay determined this as an attack by a bull and a female lying down on the ground trying to defend it. Allchin explains it as a gaur standing on its hind legs, slightly elevated above a human figure. Its front legs are shown in attacking mode. The bull's erect penis is shown in its correct anatomical posture. The image under the gaur is not very clear and consequently difficult to interpret. Allchin and Mackay see a headdress to the far right bottom of the seal impression.

According to Allchin, the image is of a very dynamic and excited bull who is about to take on a female goddess in an act of possible sexual violence, and yet the clear appearance of her open, exposed genitals reveals that she is willing partner in this course. Allchin clearly rejects this scene as a sacrifice ceremony of a horse-Ashwamedha.

1.10.4 Resemblance in Iranian and Indus Seals

According to R.P. Wright, recent excavations show that the Iranian seals which belonged to 'Jirfort Culture' centered on the region of the Halil Basin, share many of the same themes and images with cultures further to the west. While these resemblances could be due to the strong cultural relations with the west, they changed in the late third millennium when the features indicate 'a reorientation among the communities on the Iranian plateau, away from the urban centres in the west, and towards the communities of the north, south and east'.

The images on Iranian seals carry a similar symbolic vocabulary structure of presentation reminiscent of both Indus and Mesopotamian imagery which include natural phenomena, flora and fauna and supernatural beings. It emphasised human or animal images, identified as divine or supernatural based on the presence of horned headdresses, wings and emerging vegetation, or snakes and wings which may be directly attached to the body of the deity.

The seals of Iranian and Harappan Civilization have great similarities in many respects. Throughout Mesopotamia, south central Iran and the Indus region, the symbolic content of seals is Complementary. There is an expression of a belief in a natural order that is simultaneously human and supernatural. It lends support to the idea of a society that conceives of a world inhabited by a pantheon of god and goddesses, humans and

composite animals, all of which are dominated by elements of the natural world and cosmos.

Most supernatural beings are identified as particularly human and where humans and mythical beings are present, they appear to interact with each other.

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There was a cultural modification that transformed the narratives' uniquely local style. The content of ideas and representation were manipulated to conform to local corners. The substitution of animals of equal power and ferocity with one's move towards the home in an Indus landscape and with local plants took on a symbolic significance. Ornaments for instance, bangles are ubiquitous in Harappan artifacts, assemblages and an emphasis on hairstyles and headdresses that fall in line with idea of the terracotta female figurines. The presence of androgynous characters and the absence of overt sexuality and the excess dominance of female deities are striking on both the Indus and Iranian seals.

The Indus seals and amulets also depict natural vegetation. A good number of trees, plants and animals were depicted on the seals which may have had religious significance. The most common tree used in these images was Peepal. If there is a figure peering out from between its branches, it revealed the tree spirit. Animal depictions were also in vogue on seals and sealings. For example, elephant, rhinoceros, snake, antelope, tiger, gharial and the most popular, bull, either humped or humpless, are often seen. Historians believe that may have had cultic significance.

1.11 POTTERY AND PAINTING

Harappans were fond of coloured pottery which was decorated with different images of plants and animals. Some of these pottery items were carried from other places. There are several similarities in Ahar-white painted black and red ware commonly found on many Sindh-Harappa sites in Kutch i.e. Dholavira and Surkotada. Kulli style sherd is also found in the Indus valley, even at Mohenjodaro. Line painting on pots was also known as being the simplest kind of painted decoration. Pottery slips were also common and mostly were in red. Slips are a kind of paint used to cover virtually the entire visible surface of the pot.

Pottery painting of the Harappan region is never found as a high proportion of the total pottery assemblage. The painting style is totally Harappan and had a provincial sense in the eastern domain. The classical painting style is found in the Sindh-Harappa domains and Cholistan.

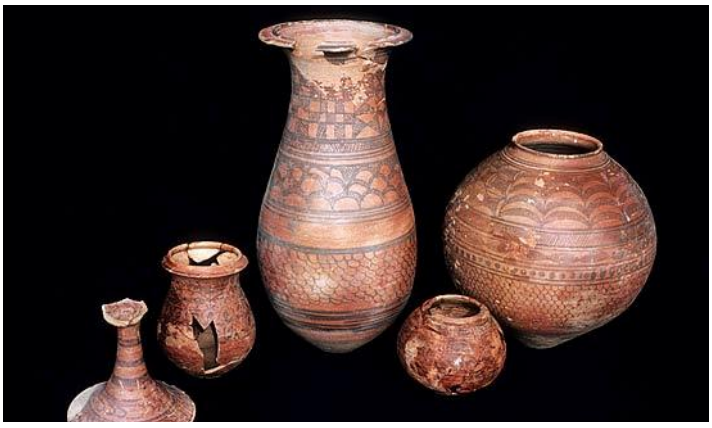

Fig. 1.35 *Indus Painted Pottery*

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1.12 SUMMING UP

- The Indus Civilization was first discovered by the British archaeologist Sir John Marshall with R. D. Banerjee at Mohenjodaro.
- M. S. Vats excavated at Harappa (now in Pakistan) in the 1920s, and it is sometimes called the Harappan Civilization.
- In 1946, the British archaeologist Sir Mortimer Wheeler excavated at Harappa and located stylistically different pottery in the earliest occupied areas.
- The most significant thing in this civilization is the similarities in many dimensions of their social and economic life.
- The people of the Indus Valley gave to the world its earliest cities, its town planning, its architecture and sculpture in stone and clay and its sanitation methods which shows their concern for health and sanitation. They built a very scientific drainage system in their cities which has set an example for us. There is enough evidence to show that some of the early conceptions of Hinduism are derived from this civilization. On the whole, the present cultural form is a composite product resulting from a fusion of several cultures where the contribution of the Indus people is of utmost importance.
- The earliest Indian art and sculpture emerged from the valley of the Indus region during the second half of the third millennium BC. The best-known sites are Harappa and Mohenjodaro and they are among the earliest examples of civic planning. Houses, markets, storage facilities, granaries, and public baths were made with great enthusiasm. They were arranged very systematically in a grid like method. They had a highly complex drainage system.
- The best sculptures of the civilization are the bronze Dancing Girl from Mohenjodaro and red Jasper Torso from Harappa. The differences between Harappa and Mohenjodaro, in terms of the sculpture in the round is worthy of note. The Dancing Girl of Mohenjodaro is the unique master piece of Indus history. Dancing Girl is one of the best known artifacts from the Indus Valley. The jaunty manner and liveliness of the figure is remarkable.
- The two cities that we know as the best are very different in the terms of the corpus of sculptures found. There are a good number of terracotta artifacts which are alive with a sense of humour. The Harappan Civilization produced many statuettes made of steatite and limestone. Some statuettes resemble the hieratic style of contemporary Mesopotamia, while others are done in the smooth, sinuous style that is the prototype of later Indian sculpture, in which the plastic modelling reveals the animated breath of life. Also found in this region, are square steatite seals adorned with a range of animals, including naturalistically rendered bulls; ceramic storage jars with simple, stylized designs; toys with wheels; and figurines, which may be mother goddesses. Bronze weapons, tools, and sculptures indicate a sophisticated craftsmanship rather than a major aesthetic development.
- Stone Sculpture in the Indus Valley Civilization is a form of art found from various sites of the Indus Civilization which includes sculptures, seals, pottery, gold jewelry, terracotta figures etc. In stone, two of the most discussed male figures are also noticeable. This nude male torso is considered to be a remarkable object that in its balanced lines stands somewhat equal to the beautiful art of Gandhara two thousand

Check Your Progress

9. Name the animals which were depicted in the art of the Indus civilization.
10. Which sculpture is considered to be the most captivating piece of the Indus art?
11. What do you understand by Proto Shiva?

years later. The steatite figure of Bearded Priest king is one of the finest creations of the Harappan people.

- Bronze casting was a widespread practice during the Indus Valley Civilization, particularly in Harappa. The bronze statues were made by the lost wax technique. Metal casting was popular at all the major centres of the Harappan Civilization. Terracotta images are inferior in depiction of the human forms in comparison to the copper and bronze images of the Indus Valley. Mother Goddess, the most important terracotta figure in the Indus Valley Civilization is the figure of Matri Devi. This figure is a crude standing female adorned with necklaces hanging over prominent breasts and who is wearing a loin cloth and a girdle. The most distinct feature of the Mother Goddess figurine is a fan-shaped headdress with a cup-like projection on each side. Rest of the facial figures are very crude and distant from being realistic.
- No doubt that the Indus Civilization was cosmopolitan and existing in an outward looking phase of history. The Indus world had trade relations with contemporary civilizations which had an impact on their social and religious life. Their cultural dynamism lies in openness, interaction and bilingualism. The Indus Civilization has always worked as a source of inspiration for the upcoming art forms and artists of India and abroad.

1.13 KEY TERMS

- **Bronze Age:** The Bronze Age is a time period characterized by the use of bronze, the oldest known compound made of tin and zinc.
- **Terracotta:** Fired clay, brownish-red in color when unglazed, that is used for architectural ornaments and facings. Used frequently for making figurines, toys and masks in the Indus Civilization.
- **Pictographic script:** A picture or symbol standing for a word or a group of words used in the Harappan culture which is still not deciphered.
- **Pashupati seal:** A seal depicting the master of animals i.e. resembling Lord Shiva.

1.14 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The only sources through which we can know about the Indus Civilization are archaeological artifacts, mainly because the script has not deciphered as yet.
2. The sites of Harappa are found in Sind, Makran, Baluchistan, Punjab, Haryana, north Rajasthan, Kathiawad, Kutch and Bandakhstan in the modern states of Pakistan, India and Afghanistan.
3. The principal regions of the Indus Civilization are Baluchistan and the North-West frontier, the mountains on eastern end of the Iranian plateau which also includes the plains of the Indus valley, Punjab of Pakistan and India, Haryana and the Ganga-Yamuna doab.
4. Gregory L. Possehl authored the book *The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary* Perspective.

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5. Ganweriwala is located about 50 kilometres south-west of Fort Derawara in the Cholis.
6. Rao has claimed that Lothal was a port town of the Indus Civilization.
7. The broken torso of a male dancing figure, made of dark grey stone has been found by D. R. Sahani during his excavation at Harappa.
8. A very common and omnipresent figurine of the female goddess, Matri Devi is found in most Indus sites.
9. There are numerous kinds of animals in the art of Indus civilization. Elephants, humped bulls, tigers, water buffalos, zebras, rhinoceros were enormously popular depictions on seals.
10. The bronze dancing girl is an eye catching sculpture found in Mohenjodaro. It is considered to be the most captivating piece of art form.
11. A seal found by Mackay depicts a yogi who is in meditation and surrounded by some animals. Marshall identified this image as 'Proto Shiva'. He declared this image as the forerunner of the consummate Hindu deity.

1.15 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on The Indus Civilization?
2. Describe the famous Priest King sculpture of this civilization.
3. What was the role of terracotta figurines in the religious life of the Harappan people?
4. Discuss the lost wax method used for making sculptures.
5. what role does seals play in the study of the Indus Civilization?

Long-Answer Questions

1. How was the Indus Valley Civilization unearthed? Describe briefly.
2. Write an essay on the Art and Sculpture of the Indus Civilization.
3. Do you agree that the drainage system in Harappan cities indicates sophisticated town planning? Give reasons.

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UNIT 2 MAURYAN ART

STRUCTURE

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2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Mauryan Empire is marked for its great achievements in art, culture, architecture and literature. The period was marked by mature use of stone and production of masterpieces. It was a royal art patronized by Mauryan kings, especially Samrat Ashoka.

Except for the relics of the palace of Chandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra, Bihar, the art and architecture of the Mauryan period is mainly Ashokan. It can be classified into s*tupas*, pillars, caves, palaces and pottery.

The *stupas* were solid domes built with bricks and stones, and were of different sizes. Ashoka built several *stupas*, spread out in different parts of India. However, most of the *stupas* have not survived the ravages of time. The Ashokan *stupas* were constructed to celebrate the achievements of Gautama Buddha. It is believed that there were 84,000 *stupas* that were built to protect the remnants of the Buddha.

The pillars of *dharma* are the most remarkable monuments of Mauryan art. These pillars were constructed as free standing columns, which were not used as supports to any structure. The two main parts of the pillars were the shaft (a monolith column made of one piece of stone with attractive polish) and the capital. The Sarnath Pillar in Madhya Pradesh is one of the best examples of Mauryan art and sculpture. This

consists of four figures of lions standing back to back, smaller figures of four animals, and an inverted lotus flower.

Besides *stupas* and pillars, the Mauryan architecture also included the caves at Barabar hill in the north of Gaya and the Nagarjuni hill caves, the Sudama cave and the Gopi cave, among others.

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The Mauryan era also witnessed beautiful buildings and royal palaces, such as in Pataliputra, which were noted for creative artwork. However, as most of these constructions were made of wood, they got damaged over a period of time.

The unique level of craftsmanship sculpturing denotes the success of Mauryan art. One of the remarkable achievements of the period is the Lion Capital built by Ashoka at Sarnath, which also is the national emblem of republic India.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Trace the evolution of the visual art forms in India
- Explain the gradual evolution of the Mauryan art
- Describe the Mauryan court art, particularly the Mauryan pillars
- Discuss the comparative study of Mauryan and Achaemenid art
- Understand Mauryan popular art
- Identify the other miscellaneous arts of the Mauryan period
- Assess the constraints of Mauryan art

2.2 VISUAL ARTS

The aspects and modes of visual art expression in India's rich cultural heritage strongly flourished during the Mauryan Empire. In the broadest sense, visual arts can be classified as follows:

- Architecture
- Sculpture
- Painting
- Terracotta

Each of the above categories will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

2.2.1 Architecture

Architecture may be grouped under two categories:

1. Secular Architecture

The specimens of the oldest secular architecture are the cities of the Indus valley civilization. Archaeological excavations have helped discover several brick ramparts in some places in the Ganga valley, such as Ahichhatra, Vaishali, Kaushambi and Sravasti, among others, which are the remains of the Second Urbanization Period. The excavations at Kumrahar also led to the discovery of the remains of the Mauryan

palace, which gives us some fragmented views of the ancient buildings that find corroboration with literary accounts.

2. Religious Architecture

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Religious architecture may again be sub-divided into two categories:

- Buddhist and Jain
- Brahmanical

Although Vedic rituals did not require temples or images, the non-Vedic cult, such as those of the *Nagas*, Tree Spirits, *Yaksha*/*Yakshi* and Mother Goddesses, must have had their shrines with their images. Authentic references of temples and images began to appear from 4th Century BC and their numerous types were represented from relief work from the 1st Century BC. Probably, in the initial stages, there were wooden structures made up of perishable objects, and later stone was introduced.

(i) Buddhist and Jain architecture: Buddhist/Jain architecture can be grouped under three categories:

(a) ***Stupas:*** *Stupas* (see Figure 2.1) are dome-shaped structures built upon the relics of great masters. Some of the famous *stupas* pertaining to this period are the *stupas* of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.

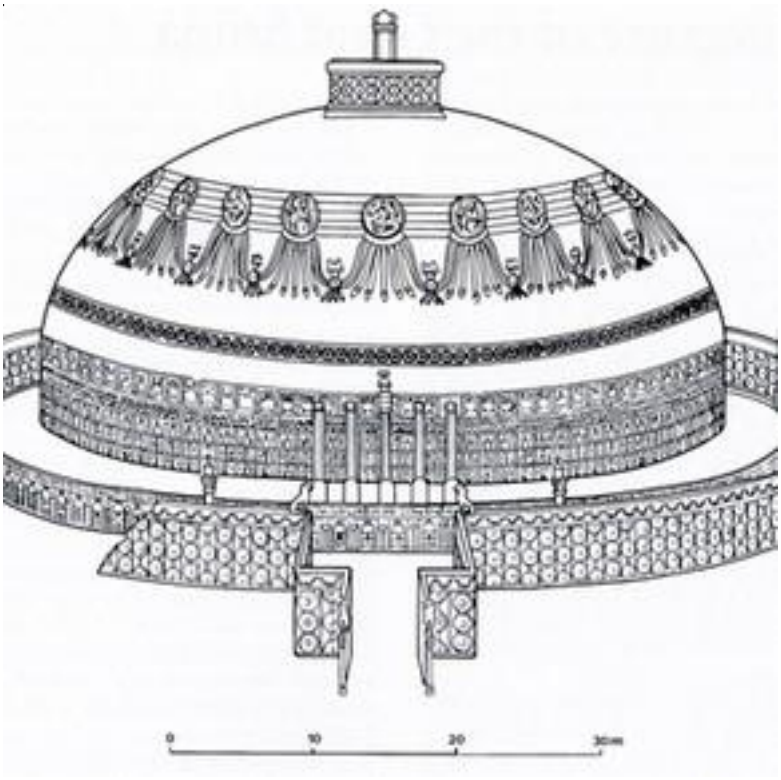

Fig. 2.1 *Structure of a Typical Stupa*

(b) ***Chaityas:*** This word initially implied shrine, but in the course of time, it became a place of worship, and thus evolved the concept of *chaitya griha* – a hall in which a *chaitya* or a *stupa* occupies an important place. The *chaitya grihas* are mostly rock-cut architecture. These *chaityas* were built by both Buddhists and Jains.

NOTES

One of the famous *chaityas* built probably during the Mauryan period is in the Lomas Rishi caves in Barabar Hills in Gaya district, Bihar. Others are found in Bhaja caves in Pune, followed by Karla, Nasik and Ajanta in West India. Moreover, the Jain cave architecture was found in Udaygiri and Khandagiri in Orissa during Kharavella period (1st Century BC). A typical *chaitya* is shown in Figure 2.2.

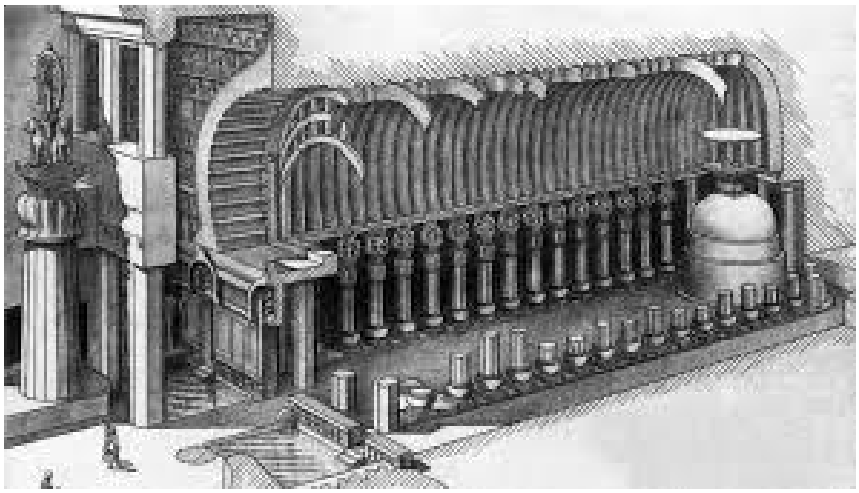

Fig. 2.2 *A Typical Chaitya*

(c) ***Viharas or Monasteries:*** *Viharas* are again associated with Buddhist and Jain sects. The monks originally were travellers, begging for food and resting in whatever shelter was available to them. Later, they were allowed to assemble in certain specified areas where they lived in huts or caves on mountain cliffs. As the monastic organization developed, *viharas* became the permanent place of residence for them with rows of cubicle along thefour sides of the inner quadrangles that emerged. Initially, they were rock-cut structures, but later, massive structures with several stories came into vogue.

(ii) Brahmanical architecture: Brahmanical religious architecture relates to the development of temple architecture. Initially, *devakula* was made of perishable materials. A few stray instances of temple structures are found in Bairath (Jaipur), but they bear no remarkable tradition.

The Gupta age heralded a new époque in the history of temple architecture in India. Gupta temples laid the foundation of two important styles of subsequent temple architecture which are as follows:

(a) Nagara style or with a pointed high tower

(b) Dravida style or terraced structured tower with heavily ornamented sculptured relics on exterior walls

2.2.2 Sculpture

The sculptural art of India occupies the foremost position in the history of art of the world. The artists in India had attained a high degree of excellence and some specimens are marvels of human skills which show tremendous intensity of feelings. The earliest sculpture came from pre-Indus and Indus Valley Civilization.

There was an intervening gap between the Indus phase and the Mauryan cultural phase. The Mauryan art exhibits an advanced stage of development of the Indian art, but it was mainly court art, detached from Indian folk tradition. After the collapse of the Mauryan dynasty, several important schools of art flourished in India in different regions.

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2.2.3 Painting

Painting is another important category of art in India. We have abundant references of paintings in Brahmanical and Buddhist literature. Ancient Indian people were well aware of various kinds of paintings. Earliest specimen of paintings was mainly discovered in Madhya Pradesh and the adjacent regions.

Earliest historical examples of painting are noted in Yogimara caves in Ramgarh hills (Madhya Pradesh) where a few rows of human figures in yellow ochre and earth colour have been painted. They have some sort of resemblance with the costumes of stone carving and relief work at Sanchi (1st Century BC). There was, however, a long gap between the next phase of Indian mural painting, which was found at Ajanta in cave number 9 and 10. This style eventually culminated in the highly stylized and sophisticated murals of Ajanta cave by the Gupta period.

2.2.4 Terracotta

Burnt clay or terracotta served as an easy and convenient material for art.

Terracotta art can be divided into:

- **Primitive form (or ageless):** It is mainly done in appliqué technique with simple pressure of hand.
- **Stylized form (or time bound):** In this form, variation comes where moulds were used.

Different racial and ethnic traditions characterized the terracotta art, which is a continuous process. Moreover, this is the only material art where historical continuity can be noted.

2.3 EVOLUTION OF MAURYAN ART

In order to trace the gradual evolution of Mauryan art, we can rely upon the vast mass of literary sources. We can draw a general picture of the period from the *Jatakas* and *Sutras*, with some reserves from the epics, in greater details from Kautilya's *Arthashastra* and from the classical accounts, particularly Megasthenes' *Indika*, Arrian and Strabo, among others. We can also have a glimpse of the period from the vast Chinese travel accounts of Fa Hien and Hiuen Tsang. Numerous remains of sculptures, statues, pillars, *stupas*, *chaitas*, terracotta figurines and architecture pertaining to the Maurya period also illuminate our understanding of not only the art of the period but also to a great extent, the social, cultural, economic, and political as well as the material life of the people.

Check Your Progress

1. Classify visual arts.
2. Name some of the famous *stupas* of the Mauryan period.
3. State the two forms of terracotta art.
4. What is a *chaitya griha*.

2.3.1 The Mauryan Period (320-185 BCE)

During the mid-6th Century BC, shortly after the time of Mahavira and Buddha, several small kingdoms and republics of Northern India were absorbed by a few competing great powers, until in the late 4th Century BC, the Mauryan Empire emerged as the first, and for a long time, the last among all Indian states. The leading and eventually

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successful state in this struggle was Magadha, at present south Bihar.

Bimbisara (544–493 BC), the Emperor of Magadha, chose Giriraja as his capital, situated in a valley of the mountains in the south of Patna. He renamed it as Rajagriha ('royal residence'), the present Rajgir. It seems to have been a modest town (c. 4.5 miles in circumference), enclosed by a moat with gates. His successor Ajatashatru (493– 462 BC) felt secure to build a likewise fortified suburb, new Rajagriha, in the plains, just outside the valley.

However, Magadha was then threatened with an invasion by King Pradyota of Avanti (Malwa). Ajatashatru found himself forced to protect Rajagriha by an additional defence line running for almost thirty miles along the crest of the surrounding hills. Several fortifications were most likely constructed. The foundations of these buildings were probably made up of timber and mud, perhaps several storeys high. Ajatashatru had already found a fort (in Pataliputra, near present Patna, Bihar, which was soon to supersede Rajagriha) at the confluence of the rivers Ganges and Son, in order to keep in check the *Lichhavi* tribe of North Bihar. This stretch of land was protected by high dikes, between the two most important rivers and surrounded by marshy plains, which turn into lakes during rainy season. Although this piece of land was as pregnable as the older capital, it developed into a natural centre of communications and trade.

King Udayin of Magadha founded the city of Kusumapura at Pataliputra. Later, King Munda made this city his residence. Although the Sisunaga rulers returned to Rajagriha, afterwards the Nandas made Pataliputra its capital for several years.

It is difficult to ascertain how many of the remains of other Indian cities go back to this time. At present, we have a reliable evidence for Vaishali in North Bihar, for Ahichhatra, the capital of Panchala (Oudh), Kaushambi, and for the fortifications of Ujjain which was laid out by king Pradyota, by the middle of 6th Century BC. It is to be noted that the walls of Ahichhatra, made of baked bricks, still rise to a height of 40 to 50 feet; moreover, in the centre of the town, there stood a large temple on which the principal streets converged.

At Rajagriha, kings Bimbisara and Ajatashatru had already built a vast hall, monasteries which were several storeys high (*mahaviharas*) and Buddhist relic shrines (*chaiyas, stupas*), one of them enshrining most of the bones and ashes of the Buddha. However, none of them exist now. They were rebuilt many times because of their special sacredness. Because the Buddha probably had often stayed at Rajagriha, especially on *Gridhrakuta* (Vulture's Hill); an ancient road still leads up to the hill, studded with memorial shrines. Mahavira might have had also lived at Rajagriha, and at present, many Jain temples stand on all the surrounding hills. However, the only early Jain monument left there is the Son Bhandar cave.

We know that figure sculpture flourished at that time, for the early Buddhist scriptures also make references to idols of gods and goddesses. The *Jatakas* also mention that artisans were organized in eighteen guilds, comprising wood-workers, smiths, painters and ivory workers, among others.

Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire and the first emperor to unify most of Greater India into one state, displaced the last king of the Nanda dynasty around 320 BC and made himself the master of Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha. Chandragupta's empire expanded over the whole of India (except the farthest southern tip) and over Afghanistan, south of the Hindukush. The empire was held together by nationalistic ideal and centralized bureaucracy. With this, the idea of the *Chakravartin*, or the 'world emperor', came up.

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The Maurya court also borrowed certain paraphernalia from the outside world to highlight its new glory. However, such adaptations should be fully integrated into national ideology. One of the principal paraphernalia of power is art; for art has to create the splendour of power and symbols of divine election to impress the masses into submission and loyalty.

Pataliputra grew into a vast city, approximately 10 miles in length and 2 miles in breadth. It was surrounded by a wooden wall pierced with loopholes for the discharge of arrows, crowned with 560 towers and provided with sixty gates. Parts of these wooden fortifications have been excavated south of the present embankment at Bulandibagh in Patna. It is a double row of palisades, interlinked by horizontal beams and filled with earth; at one place, the outlet of a drain was found, which was constructed of massive posts and planks, joined by iron strips.

References to the palace of Pataliputra can be found from the accounts of classical writers, like Megasthenes, Arrian, Strabo, and even from Chinese travellers like Fa Hien. Megasthenes describes the palace as no less magnificent than the palaces of Susa and Ecbatana (Persian Empire). The palace was still standing at the beginning of the 5th Century AD when Fa Hien tells us that it was attributed to the work of genii, but when Hsuan Tsang visited the city in the 7th Century, the palace had been burnt to the ground and the place was almost deserted. Fragments of the palace have been discovered by L.A. Waddell and D.B. Spooner at Kumrahar (modern Bankipore, near Patna).

It has been suggested that Chandragupta I might have taken the initiative in the general planning and execution for building the city as well as the royal palace. Moreover, Ashoka might have also contributed to the original layout and the building. Archaeological reports record that Waddell discovered a wooden city wall, while Spooner discovered a huge wooden building, most important of which was a multi-pillared hall, in which probably stone pillars were also used to support the wooden roof. The pillars resembled the Ashokan isolated pillars used for his edicts. It revealed that before the use of stone for building purposes, wood was generally used. Minor antiquities included some fragments of polished sandstone sculpture, and a few very fine terracottas, now in the Museum of Patna.

Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka (272 – 232 BC), who in his early life might have been following Brahminism, Jainism or possibly *Magianism*, later in life became an ardent Buddhist. Ashoka first made Buddhism a kind of state religion. His monolithic pillar and rock edicts inculcating the practice of the *Dhamma* or Law of Piety are well known; he is credited with the erection of approximately 80,000 *stupas*, and countless monasteries. This is mainly because of the fact that he felt the need for propagating ideas through the medium of art to the people.

In the ninth year of his reign, after the ravages of Kalinga war, Ashoka was drawn towards Buddhism and became the foremost missionary of Buddhism. He sent Buddhist missionaries to other parts of India and to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and towards west as far as Syria and Egypt. He appointed special officers (*dharmamahamatras*) to look after the moral condition of the people, to suppress many of the primitive religious customs, to discourage the slaughter and sacrifice of animals, and to encourage the foundation of charitable institutions. The empire included the whole of northern India from east to west, Afghanistan and Kashmir, with only the far south remaining independent. The later Mauryas ruled till about 184 BC, when the Sunga dynasty succeeded; however, the kingdom had already begun to break up

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soon after the death of Ashoka, when the power of the Andhras in the south was already developing.

For propagating Buddhism, Ashoka built *stupas* and erected pillars. He also erected rock-cut sanctuaries in the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills. Moreover, his palace at Pataliputra had some of his spectacular creations. Nevertheless, the most fascinating are the Mauryan pillars. The designs of these pillars unmistakably point out that the inspiration for carving them came from West Asia. Percy Brown rightly points out that Mauryan rulers might have employed the craftsmen hailing from West Asia, guided them to adapt their work to the Indian conditions and made them work in collaboration with their Indian counterparts. Ashoka, the great Mauryan monarch, was probably influenced by the traditions of the West Asian kings as it is evident from the designs of the Mauryan pillars. He had even employed Tushaspa (his personal advisor) as the governor of the north-western part of his empire.

The fact that Ashoka was influenced by the traditions of the West Asian kings is undeniable. Even in the practice of issuing the edicts on rocks, he borrowed the inspiration from king Darius (527–486 BC) of the Achaemenid dynasty. This tradition of West Asian courts must have reached him through the agency of Asiatic Greeks whose dominions in north-western India lay contiguous to the Mauryan Empire under Ashoka.

Excavations show that his famous palace at Pataliputra formed a large and magnificent group of buildings. A few capital cities were now acquiring increasing importance, amongst which Taxila, Ayodhya, Ujjain, Vidisa and Pataliputra are most prominent; but the village is still the typical centre of Aryan life. All the crafts were practised; eighteen of the most important (amongst which that of the painters is mentioned) being organized in guilds (*sreni*). Carpenter, iron-smith and potters occupied their own villages. The more pretentious houses were built of wood with squared beams, sometimes of several storeys supported by pillars and with well provided balconies. City walls were made of burnt or un-burnt bricks.

The art of glass-making and cutting of hard stones had in the previous centuries attained a great perfection, unequalled at any later period. Art of textile making also reached a height by the Mauryan period. Stone began to come into use both in architecture and for sculpture. The special characteristic of the Ashokan work was the fine finishing and polishing of the surface, conspicuous even in the case of the excavated monastic halls.

2.3.2 Prelude to Mauryan Art

Recent discovery at Mehrgarh, Baluchistan have extended the plastic art activity of India to as far as 800 BC. Plastic art in India probably passed through ages with peasant culture with Kulli and Zhob in Baluchistan dating 4000 BC and eventually attained maturity by the urban Harappan culture. In the Harappan culture, the primary materials used for plastic art were terracotta, stone and bronze.

- Terracotta or burnt clay produced human figurines, animal figures and delightful toys, enigmatic seals, and multi-shaped painted and polished pottery.
- Stone was used to produce human torsos. Finest example being a male figure dressed in an upper garment and decorated with trefoil designs.
- Bronze was used to produce unique small structures. For example a dancing girl, miniature animal figures, etc.

The Harappan culture had set up trends and tendency of the Indian art, which developed and flourished in the course of time. There was, however, a gap between the pre-historic and proto-historic phase of the Indian art and earliest historical phase with the coming of the Mauryas. Enormous volumes of terracotta figurines discovered throughout India without any definite archaeological context probably formed the connective link between the gaps of these two phases, which was suggestive of continuity. The art of the Mauryan period may be said to be exhibited in three main phases:

1. Continuation of pre-Mauryan tradition

The continuation of pre-Mauryan tradition refers to some instances to the representation of Vedic deities; the most striking illustration of this development is afforded by the sculptured reliefs of *Surya* and *Indra* in the *Veranda* (corridor) of the ancient *Vihara* at Bhaja in Maharashtra.

2. Mauryan court art

The Mauryan court art is clearly depicted in the monolithic columns of Ashoka, which were inscribed with his famous edicts.

3. Beginning of brick and stone architecture

The beginning of brick and stone architecture could be seen in the *stupa* at Sanchi, the small monolithic rail at Sanchi and the Lomas Rishi cave in the Barabar hills near Bodh Gaya, with its ornamented facade, reproducing the forms of a wooden structure.

Moreover, the advent of the Mauryas in the political scene of India represented a definite landmark. The ideals of universal suzerainty and empire building were materialized by unifying a greater part of India under one banner by establishing a strong, centralized administration. The foreign invasion was successfully checked and the spirit of self-consciousness and self-reliance was the outcome. With the expansion of the political horizon, the intellectual outlook was correspondingly widened. Political, intellectual and psychological outlook proved to be of immense importance for the development of formative art of the country. So the earliest known phase of 'Indian Art' began with the Mauryas.

2.3.3 Major Specimens

The Mauryan art is miscellaneous in nature. It consists of a monolithic railing at Sarnath (Varanasi), a *chaitya* hall in Barabar hills in Bodh Gaya (Bihar) and the front half of an elephant curved out on the rock at Dhauli (Orissa). The architectural remains of Ashoka's reign in polished sandstone include a monolithic railing and fragments of inscribed capitals at Sarnath; the alter (*Bodhi-manda*) at Bodh Gaya; the remains of the capital city of Pataliputra; a railing pillar with inscription from Arjunpura site, Mathura; the foundations of *chaitya* halls at Sanchi and Sonari; the *chaitya* halls in the Barabar hills, Bihar, dedicated for the use of *Ajivikas*, not Buddhists; and the Lomas Rishi cave, Bihar, undated and apparently unfinished, but it is certainly Mauryan. At least four other Mauryan cave shrines or monasteries are found in the same district, which are all excavated in hardest rock, but are exquisitely finished and polished like glass inside. The forms are evidently those of contemporary structural buildings in indigenous style.

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In the realm of architecture, the Mauryan period witnessed the emergence of two architectural forms which continued to dominate Buddhist architecture of the subsequent period. The first is the *stupa* and then the rock-cut chamber.

The rudimentary *stupa* and the rock-cut chamber of the Mauryan period were developed into a full-fledged *stupa* and *chaitya* by the Sunga period. The technique of rock-cut architecture continued to dominate architecture even in the Hindu period.

A stupa constitutes an integral part of the Buddhist art. Ashoka mentions in his inscription that he erected the *stupas* in order to enshrine the relics of the Buddha. A *stupa* is a massive hemispherical structure, surrounded by a balustrade and crowned by a stone umbrella. So, it is just a variety of the funeral tumulus, surrounded by a stone circle, such as had been usual in later prehistoric times, just like those erected also by the Vedic Indo-Aryans above the remains of prominent chiefs and kings. Such tumuli have been discovered at Lauriya Nandangarh (near Betiah in Champaran district, North Bihar). These have proved to be *stupas* and still preserve certain characteristics of the Vedic burial mound, e.g., the central pillar and the small gold leaf motives which are stamped with the image of the earth goddess referred to in the ancient hymns.

However, even these are enclosed by a brick platform and a retaining wall, with an interior system of radial and circular walls, and in most mounds, the wooden pillar has been replaced by one in brick. Likewise, their slightly depressed convex curvature does not yet resemble a hemisphere; but this outline is still a characteristic of some of Ashoka's *stupas*, e.g., those erected at Lalita Patan and Kirtipur in Nepal. While some of the *stupas* built by Ashoka succumbed to the ravages of time, others were obscured by later renovations. Thus, the core of the *stupa* at Sanchi can be attributed to the Ashokan period on the basis of the artifacts discovered there. According to the Buddhist tradition, the foundation of the *stupa* at Amaravati can also be attributed to Ashoka.

In addition to this, excavations conducted near an Ashokan pillar at Bairat in Madhya Pradesh revealed the foundations of a brick *stupa* which can be assigned to the Ashokan period. The primitive shape of this *stupa* is at once an indication that it was the earliest effort in the direction of the *stupa* architecture. It is covered by wedge-shaped bricks and is enclosed by a wooden railing.

The *stupa* was surrounded by a railing (*vedika*), consisting of posts (*thaba*) connected by horizontal beams (*suchi*) and covered by a coping-stone (*ushnisha*), which symbolized the circulation of the stars, hours and the seasons around the world; the balustrade was interrupted by gateways (*torana*) in the four directions of the horizon. Between the *stupa* and the railing was the *pradakshinapatha*, for circumambulation of the sanctuary.

*The chaitya*s consisted of rows of cells for the monks, an assembly hall (*chaityasala*) and a refectory. Ashokan *chaitya* halls are traceable at Sanchi, Sarnath, Sonari and probably also in the Krishna-Godavari delta.

Though a Buddhist himself, Ashoka extended equal patronage to other religious sects like *Ajivikas*. For the residence of the monks of the *Ajivika* hermitage, he ordered the erection of nine cells in the Barabar and Nagarjuni hills, in the neighbourhood of Rajagriha. These rock-cut chambers, excavated into the perpendicular cliffs situated in the vicinity of Bodh Gaya (Bihar), were the first of their kind in India.

NOTES

Architecturally, these chambers do not have much to offer. Of modest proportions, they are devoid of any organic plan or sculptural decoration. Most of them are plain rock chambers with vaulted ceilings and highly polished walls, a characteristic which is notable in all sculpture of the Mauryan period. The Lomas Rishi caves, however, consist of two chambers — an interior round one and a larger ante-room opening on its long side to the terrace outside; they look as if a circular hut at the end of a courtyard has been imitated inside the rock. The Lomas Rishi cave (see Figure 2.3) has an exterior entrance shaped like the front of a house of that time: two slightly inclined posts carry a 'wooden' vaulted roof, the rafters of which are still visible; the roof, slightly pointed, ends in a finial; an inner arch decorated with a frieze of elephants, frames the quadrangular door.

Moreover, the interior of the Gopi cave exhibits a vaulted roof, which is clearly out of place in a stone construction. Evidently, this is a stone copy of the pre-existing timber constructions. The frieze containing a row of animals on the facade of the Lomas Rishi cave is a clear indication of the technical expertise of the craftsmen of the Mauryan period in carving animal figures.

Fig. 2.3 *Barabar Mounts, Grottoe of Lomasa Rishi.3rd Century BCE*

Besides this, Brahmanical temples have been excavated at at least two sites— one at Nagari near Chittoor (Andhra Pradesh), the ancient *Madhyamika*. A.K. Coomaraswamy, in *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, cites an inscription (350–250 BC), which refers to a temple of Samkarsana and Vasudeva at a place called *Narayana-Vata*. This is the earliest known inscription indicating the existence of the *Vaisnava* cult, and it is also the earliest known Sanskrit inscription. *Asvamedha* and *Vajapeya* sacrifices are also mentioned.

The original shrine was probably made up of wood, but continuous *Vaisnava* worship seems to have been conducted here from 3rd Century BC up to 7th AD. The excavation revealed the remains of a rectangular enclosure with walls nearly 10 feet in height at the site now known as *Hathi-Bada*, evidently the *puja-sila prakara* of the inscription. What would appear to be the earliest known depiction of a specifically Brahmanical shrine is the pavilion with an ornamental basement and enshrining figures of *Skandha*, *Visakha* and *Mahasena*, found on a coin of *Huviska*.

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The most important monument of the Mauryan art, however, are the Mauryan pillars. These pillars are found in Basarh-Bakhira (pre-Ashoka), Sankasya (c. 255 BC), Rummindei (c. 250 BC), Rampurva (244, 243 BC), Lauriya-Nandangarh (c. 242 BC), Sarnath (c. 240 BC), Sanchi (c. 235 BC) and Salemgarh (about same time), which consists of a plain but highly polished, slightly tapering shaft (about 10 yards high) without base, but with a bell capital carrying an abacus on which a symbolic animal is mounted.

2.4 CLASSIFICATION OF MAURYAN ART

The Mauryan art can be classified as follows:

- Court art
- Popular art
- Miscellaneous art

2.4.1 Characteristic Features of Mauryan Court Art

The major art style of the Mauryan period was inspired and fostered by the court. The major specimen of Mauryan court art includes the remains of the royal palace and the city of Pataliputra.

The most important element in Mauryan court art is the Mauryan pillar. The Mauryas gave up perishable materials like wood and brick, and purposely adopted stone as a medium of art for permanence and massiveness. Most of the finds were discovered along the Ganga valley, which implies that the location for the pillars was selected with transport facilities in view. Moreover, the highly centralized government of that period had control over labour and resources that enabled the production of such massive monuments.

The style of the court art of the Mauryas is also commonly known as imperial Pataliputra School. During the few decades in which these pillars were set up, their shafts grew taller; their capitals developed from a clumsy cap to an elegant 'bell' of lotus petals; their abacus grew from a broad square slab to a step-like projecting disc, decorated first with honeysuckle and rosettes, then with a frieze of *hamsas* (geese), finally with a frieze of four 'Wheels of Law' (*Dharmachakra*) alternating with horse, bull, elephant and lion (interpreted as symbols of the four cardinal points); their top forming a clumsy elephant or a bull, to lions, and finally to four mighty half-lions or half-bulls, facing in four directions and carrying a big 'Wheel of Law'.

The characteristic features of the Mauryan court art are as follows:

- Its origin is controversial.
- It shows foreign influence.
- It reflects induction of new elements like use of stone, high polish, inlay work and introduction of the lion (seated lion on capital).

The origin of the Mauryan court art has been as a subject of dispute among scholars. However, the general opinion emphasizes that the impetus initially came from outside and its distinctive new feature pointed to that direction.

One of the important features of the Mauryan court art is monolithic pillars, which were rarely followed in later times. The use of stone at a massive scale is said to have commenced with the advent of the Mauryas.

Check Your Progress

5. Who was the founder of the Mauryan Empire?
6. State the role of the *dharmamahamatras* during the Mauryan period.
7. State the special characteristic of Ashokan work.
8. Name the most important monument of the Mauryan art.

NOTES

Another important feature is the use of the technique of lustrous polish, which also never appears in the history of early Indian art. Not only in the pillars or columns, but this high polish is a characteristic of other art objects of the Mauryan period. For example, the Piprawa relic casket from Nepal border (presently in the Indian Museum) may be mentioned in this regard. It bears the inscription which says that the casket contains the body relic of the Buddha. This is the only epigraphical source of the Buddha's historicity.

Use of inlay work, i.e., the insertion of metallic wires for ornamenting the sculpture is another significant characteristic. Inlay work is found in the wheels of the abacus and on the eyebrows of the lion in the capital. This technique is unique to the imperial Pataliputra School of Art.

The extensive use of lion in Mauryan art is another notable feature. It is a unique feature because it is mainly the elephant which occupies an important position in Brahmanical and Buddhist mythology.

Historical forces for the development of the Mauryan court art

The historical forces that led to the development of the Mauryan court art are as follows:

- Establishment of political suzerainty
- Contact with the West Asiatic world
- Influence of the Achaemenid School of Art
- Hellenistic (Greek) influence

The induction of a number of new elements without any strong precedence calls for a probe into the historical and cultural forces that were at work in the Mauryan court, which were greatly responsible for the development of imperial Pataliputra School of Art. Politically, India steadily grew out of its tribal psychological outlook and lead towards the fact that Maurya established a paramount rule and all-encompassing sovereignty.

Whether the evolution of such a political outlook of the Mauryas was the outcome of natural historical process or was directly/indirectly conditioned by Asiatic world, is difficult to assess. However, in the domain of art, it is India and West Asia which participated in a common historical process. There was a strong Achaemenid influence in the domain of art.

Already in the pre-historic phase, Indus culture formed a part of the civilization that had link with Sumer and Mesopotamia. Similarly, the *Rig Vedic* culture was but a cognate of that, representing the *Avesta* (the holy book of the Zorastrians). Besides, India's intimate relation with ancient Asiatic west and Persia might also have continued.

In the 6th Century BC, a part of north India went to the political dominion of the Persian empire of Darius, and gradually Indus came to form the eastern boundary of the vast Persian Empire established by the Achaemenid dynasty. Cyrus was the founder of the Achaemenid Empire, which rapidly became the greatest empire of the time. Indeed, this dynasty was the first to materialize the idea of imperial sovereignty of the old Indian concept of *Sarvabhauma* which was later partially achieved by Nandas and fully by Mauryas. The idea of conquest may have been stimulated by the Persian Empire as Bimbisara was in contact with Gandhara—a part of Darius's empire. It is also assumed that through the scribes of Achaemenid, the *Kharosthi* script entered

NOTES

India. However, most important evidence of the Achaemenids on the domain of art during the time of Mauryas is of significance.

From 5th Century BC, the Asiatic culture throbbed in the fertile land of Persia, and as a result, a classical school of Art developed in the capital City of Achaemenid Empire, which was composed of Egyptian, Hellenistic, Semitic and Iranian elements of a distinctive character.

In fact, the elements from the Greek coast line to Persia, from Egypt to Syria, and the vast historic area was the cradle of greatest monarchies of ancient world contributing to the development of this school of art, from where talents from the leading schools of art of the known world were invited and the Hellenistic influence on it, therefore, was quite obvious. This school probably partially was dispersed by Alexander's conquest of Persia (327 BC) together with the decline of the Achemenid Empire (330 BC). The unsettled period, which followed the extension of the Macedonian Empire in the East (by means of Greek colonies, like that of Bactria), brought full force of Hellenism to the very border of Mauryan India.

The émigré artists of the original Achaemenid School and their successor might have flourished under the patronage of the Asiatic Greek, marked to be of Hellenistic influence. It was probably at this stage, when Ashoka conceived the project of erecting monuments and inducted the artists who had such proficiency in the construction of sophisticated palaces of the Persian Empire. Both Megasthenes and Kautilya refer to a state department that was run and maintained by the Mauryas for looking after the foreigners. This is suggestive of the presence of many foreigners in the Mauryan Empire and it is not unlikely that they had definite roles to play. In the 3rd Century BC, there were several routes which connected Takshasila, Gandhara with Parsepolis, Susa and Ekbatana of Persia.

Takshasila was an important seat of the Mauryan Empire, and from there, a route existed, which connected Pataliputra with the Hellenistic Empire (Greece). This route enabled craftsmen and artists to enter the Indian soil and they contributed to the shaping of the Mauryan art style, either directly or indirectly through their experiences, expertise and guidance.

2.4.2 Mauryan Pillar

The Mauryan pillar is the best known representative of the Mauryan court art. Ashoka constructed about thirty pillars in various parts of his empire. According to Percy Brown, Ashoka erected these pillars to mark and commemorate the ancient Buddhist pilgrim route, which existed between Bodh Gaya at one end and Lumbini at the other. V.S. Agrawal adds that other pillars mark the boundaries of the principal political divisions (*Janapadas*) of the *Madhyadesa* like *Kuru, Panchala, Chedi, Vatsa,* etc. The pillars at Sarnath, Rampurva, Kolhua and Lauriya Nandangarh (in Champaran district, Bihar) are worth mentioning. All of these pillars were built of sandstone quarried from Chunar (Uttar Pradesh), glistened with smooth polish typical of the Mauryan art.

There might also have been a central workshop for producing the pillars at Chunar and hundreds of craftsmen might have worked on stone for a considerable number of years under the royal patronage and supervision.

Figure 2.4 shows the front view of a single lion capital in Vaishali, Bihar.

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Fig. 2.4 *The Lion Capital in Vaishali*

A number of inscribed/un-inscribed columns with their animal capitals called *sirsha* or *Bodhika* depicting a single lion, bull, elephant, horse, *Gaduda* or a mythological bird, and four semi-lions united back to back is typical of the Mauryan art. The Ashokan pillars rise from the ground without a base and resemble the well-known Indian palm tree. They consist of two parts: a shaft and a capital of about 30 feet and 10 feet, respectively. These two parts are fitted together by means of a copper bolt, as is known from the pillar recovered from Rampurva (Bihar). The shaft of the pillar is plain, unornamented and slightly tapering. The capital consists of a bell-shaped member and an abacus supporting an animal figure.

The most important segment of the Ashokan pillar is its capital. The principal shape is that of a bell, and this is brought about by elongated lotus petals falling gracefully all alike in a natural wavy motion. The abacus is sometimes square and sometimes round, but in all cases, it supports an animal figure carved in the round. The most notable is the one hailing from Rampurva. The designs of the flowers, which are found on this abacus, appear to be irrelevant. They can be traced to the repertoire of the motifs found in the Persian art, reared under the patronage of the Achaemenid kings. On the other hand, the animal figures, though they originate from WestAsiatic influences, show marked resemblance to the Indian culture. In fact, the Mauryan artists were able to construct lively and fresh models out of the West Asian art, which has greatly influenced later Indian art and architecture.

Figure 2.5 shows the Brahmi inscriptions on a fragment of the 6th Pillar of Ashoka.

Fig. 2.5 *Brahmi Inscriptions on a Fragment of the 6th Pillar of Ashoka*

Fragment of the 6th Pillar (238 BCE) in Sandstone

Though all the pillars built by Ashoka have not survived, but one can see the stages of development of style in them. To begin with, is the specimen from Bakhira (which is

NOTES

not so developed in style), wherein we can see that the artistic excellence gradually attaining its maturity in the capitals hailing from Rampurva and Sarnath. The Sarnath pillar is well known and represents four rampant lions. On the abacus underneath these lions are a carved wheel and miniature figures of a bull, a lion, a horse and an elephant. Here, the lion seems to symbolize the power of the state.

Characteristics of the Mauryan pillar

Mauryan pillars are highly polished, tall and well-proportioned columns. They are mostly made up of *chunar* or grey sandstone, 40-50 feet in height. Each column has two parts:

1. Shaft or *Danda*: It is circular and slightly tapering and made up of a single block of stone.
2. Capital or *Sirsa* or *Bodhika*

The capital further has three parts:

1. Inverted lotus
2. Abacus
3. Crowning sculpture in the round

Figure 2.6 shows the structure of a pillar at Sarnath.

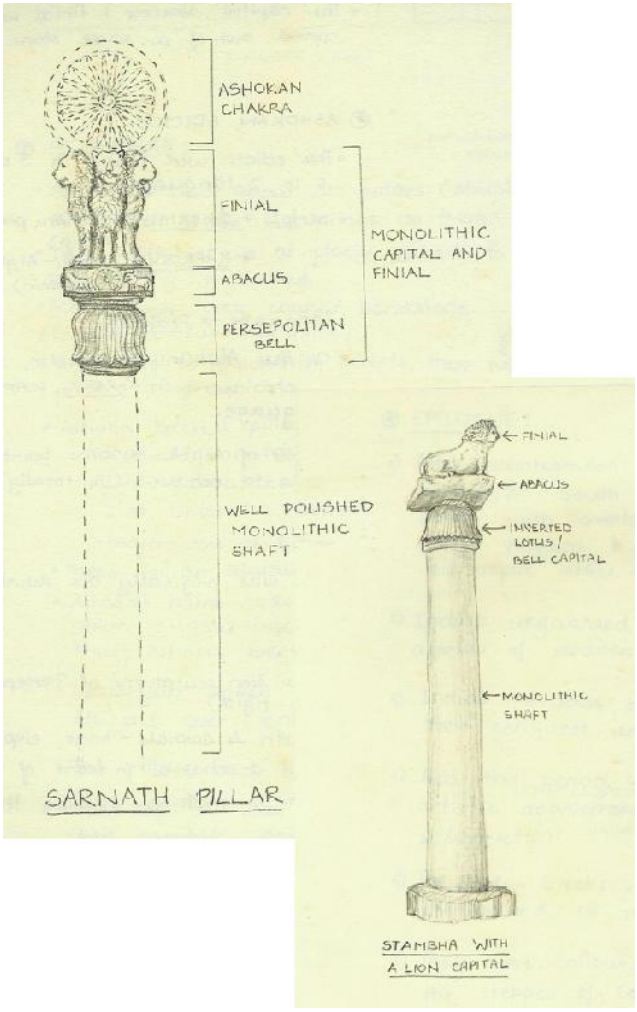

Fig. 2.6 *Structure of a Pillar at Sarnath*

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Crowning animals were not exclusively Buddhist symbols but were also associated with Brahmanical tradition and mythology. The capital also contains the Buddhist symbol of a wheel. These pillars, though alike in general form and composition, differ in the treatment of details, particularly in that of the capital. The Basarh Bakhira pillar in Nepal Terai region is crude and clumsy in execution and suggests early origin, while the Lauriya Nandangarh pillar in Bihar displays maturity in execution.

Compared to the animals in the pillar capitals, the Dhauli Elephant is artistically superior. It represents the fore part of an elephant. It exhibits a remarkable plastic sense for form and volume with dynamism, which is in strong contrast to the stylised presentation of animal figures surmounting the pillar capitals.

The monolithic railing at Sarnath in grey and polished *chunar* sandstone might have been created under the direction of Ashoka himself. It must have been literally transformed into stone from wooden originals. The Barabar and Nagarjuni caves, north of Bodh Gaya, are earliest examples of rock cut method. Except their high polish, these caves do not represent any conscious attempt towards architectural achievement. However, the architect of the Mauryan court paved the way for its evolution.

Figure 2.7 shows the lion capital at Sarnath, Varanasi.

Fig. 2.7 *The Lion Capital at Sarnath*

Points of Affinity between Mauryan Art and Achaemenid Art

Some of the similarities between the Mauryan art and Achaemenid art are as follows:

- **Pillared structures:** The most remarkable Achaemenid influence on the Mauryan art can be seen in architecture. Classical writer Strabo compared the city of Pataliputra with Susa and Ekbatana of Persia. According to him, the Mauryan pillared hall resembled the famous 'Hall of Hundred Columns' constructed at Parsepolis by Darius the Great. In fact, the columns of the Mauryas reflect Parsepolitan craftsmanship.

  Strabo further informed that the Maurya palace had halls whose pillars were decorated with golden vines and silver birds. Moreover, fragments of golden vines have been discovered in the excavation of Kumrahar, and the palaces of

NOTES

Ekbatana also had golden vines on the pillars. This adoption of the Parsepolitan style of building Pataliputra was quite evident. Fa Hien remarked that the Mauryan Empire commissioned a *genie* to construct the palace. The walls, doorways and sculptures are no human work. In the same tone, Ebn Haukal writes that the great buildings of Parsepolis were probably build by demons. Perhaps both the ideas originated from a common source, which propagated that these achievements were beyond human capacity.

- **Induction of polished columns:** The polish of the pillars appeared to have been done using imported techniques since the Achaemenid masonry has the characteristics of high polish. This period witnessed the very sudden use of stone and monumental art with huge proportions and quick evolution from primitive to conscious sophistication of tribal to imperial inclinations. Some scholars even suggest that Mauryan columns are but the Indian adaptation of the Achaemenid prototype.
- **Introduction of stylized animals:** The lion capital, particularly the Mauryan lions, is not realistic but idealized. They by no means emulate the artistic conventionalism of those of Achaemenid. The Ashokan lions have their moustaches showed by inside curves. This method of depicting stylized moustaches is also found in the art of Parsepolis.
- **Introduction to the inlay method:** The process of inlay display in the eyebrows of the lions also suggests a foreign influence. Researches have shown that at Parsepolis, the inlay of precious materials took the place of colour. Achaemenid features can also be seen in the use of motifs, designs and ornamentation. The scholars who believe in this Persian and Hellenistic influence on Mauryan art suggest that since whole of north-west India during the Sisunaga–Nanda–Maurya rule formed a part of the Asiatic West we, thus find certain cultural inter-dependence between the region extending from the Mediterranean coast up to the bank of River Indus. Thus, the Mauryan court art shares a common cultural heritage with this vast geographical region.

Points of difference between Mauryan art and Achaemenid art

The influence of Achaemenid art on the Mauryan column cannot be denied. However, there are some considerable differences which distinguishes the Mauryan column from Achaemenid. Some of the remarkable differences between the Mauryan art and the Achaemenid art are as follows:

- Achaemenid columns are parts of some greater architectural composition, whereas the Mauryan pillars are isolated and independent.
- Mauryan shafts are plain, while Achaemenid columns are faulted.
- Mauryan columns are monolithic, while Achaemenid pillars are built on separate pieces.
- Mauryan columns are reminiscent of a carpenter's work, while Achaemenid of mason.
- Achaemenid columns stand either on bell shaped bases or on plain rectangular blocks or circular mouldings, whereas Maurya column are independent with no base at all.
- Finally, the Maurya capital is supported by an inverted lotus base. The crowning abacus and the independent animal motif are absent in Achaemenid columns.

Therefore, the influence became remote due to thorough transformation.

2.4.3 Mauryan Art and its Indigenous Roots

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Some scholars are of the opinion that the issue of alien impact on Mauryan court art is rather over-estimated. Dilip Chakraborty very recently pointed out that scholars have exaggerated the foreign influence on Mauryan art and have bypassed indigenous roots. The Mauryas did develop indigenous tradition in politics, art and ideology.

1. Magadhan imperialism

While highlighting the view that Magadhan imperialism is influenced by Achaemenid Empire, it is, however, important to note that the political concept of *Raja Sarvovoumya* of the Vedic tradition and *Raja Chakrabortin* or the imperial idea developed in the Buddhist text must have played a vital role in the materialization of Mauryan imperialism. K.A. Nilakantha Sastri in *Mauryas and the Nandas* observes that the polity of the Mauryas was the culmination of the development of the indigenous tradition of imperialism.

2. Style of inscription

There is also a tendency among some scholars to suggest that the Ashokan columns were influenced by Achaemenid pillars. Forms and styles of inscription also carry signs of having been inspired. Admittedly, the preamble of Ashokan sermons in stone pillars resembles the Achaemenid inscription style. The Ashokan edicts start with the formula *Devanam Pio Piyadosi Raja Evam Aha* or 'the king beloved of God (*piyadassi*) speaks thus'. While the opening phrase of every inscription of all Achaemenid rulers is *Ksayathiyanam ksayathia* or thus said the king of kings. E. Senert pointed out that the Ashokan epigraphy is an absolutely isolated form in Indian epigraphy as this method of introduction is not to be found in other Indian inscriptions. E. Senert also speaks of undeniable affinity with Persian style of epigraphy. B.N. Barua suggests that the Ashokan inscription probably originated from the Indian literary tradition.

3. Induction of stone

Cunningham strongly refuted the conventional view that the Mauryas started using the stone as a medium of art as a result of Achamenid influence. India had a past tradition of using stone as numerous stone objects have been recovered from the Indus sites.

4. Concept of pillars

K.D.B. Codrington, V.S. Agrawal and John Irwin suggest that the Ashokan pillars are purely Indian in concept. They represented the Indian pillar cult or *Dhvajasthambha* dedicated to God. So, initially made of perishable materials, the pre-Mauryan pillars were associated with religion. Ashoka also made his pillars the vehicle to propagate the ethos of *Dhamma*. Moreover, to give them permanence, they were made of stone. In his Pillar Edict VII, Ashoka declared the *Dharma Stambha* as his own innovation. These types of indigenous pillar were not found in West Asia.

5. Treatment of animals

An indigenous root or tradition can also be identified in the treatment of animals in Mauryan art. The animals in the Indus cultural phase indicate a feeling of volume, even if they are static. These features are present in the animal figures of the Mauryan

NOTES

columns. The magnificence of animal sculpture of the Ashokan time, like the Ramapurva Pillar Bull or Dhauli Elephant, was in tune with the animals represented in the Indus cultural scenes. Hence, indigenous art tradition also contributed to the evolution of the Maurya court art. Moreover, four major animals in the Maurya capital or *Bodhika* or *Sirsha*—namely, an elephant, bull, horse and lion—formed a part of the Vedic heritage of *Mahapasu* or the noble animal concept. The Buddhist adopted them and Ashoka accepted the position. In this context, it is important to analyse a seal from Mohenjodaro depicting a divinity in Yogic posture and it is considered a prototype of Shiva. This God is shown surrounded by four animals identified by scholars as an elephant, rhino, tiger and buffalo.

The Harappan art is characterized by the induction of new themes, which recur in the domain of art in subsequent phases. It is an important question that whether this concept of animal of the Harappan culture influenced the Vedic concept of *Mahapasu*. In any case, the animal sculpture of the Mauryan period evolved out of an indigenous tradition.

6. High polish

There is doubt as to how foreign is the concept of high polish of the Mauryan art. The luminous polish of the Mauryan art, according to V.S. Agarwal, had an indigenous tradition. The *Jataka* literature made a detailed description of luminous polish. It is in no way to be lightly dismissed as imaginary. It may be assumed that people were aware of this polish long before the time of Ashoka.

Thus, if we say that Mauryan art was completely free from Achaemenid influence and it was completely indigenous, then it would be over-simplification of the Mauryan art. There was constant process of adoption and absorption of indigenous and alien elements that guided the path of the Mauryan art and gave it its own identity. According to Nihar Ranjan Ray, 'Mauryan art is not a vulgar imitation but a constant adoption of different elements, indigenous and alien'. The Achaemenid resemblance, however, touched the outer frame and were modified and absorbed into Indian heritage. The process of synthesis, thus, initiated by the Mauryas may not be mistaken for blind copy but must be taken as widening of cultural frontiers. It would be incorrect to deny some West Asian elements in the Mauryan art as knowledge and culture never develop unilaterally. However, a reassessment of the quantum and nature of these elements is necessary to appreciate the role of the indigenous tradition in the development of the Mauryan art, which evolved into a definite and distinct type of its own.

Characteristic Features

It is important to note some characteristic features of the Mauryan court art which are as follows:

- **Display of court patronage:** With its civilized quality and advanced power of visualization, the Mauryan art was inspired and fostered by the will, care and patronage of a court heavily under the influence of contemporary culture and ideology of the Asiatic West and Mediterranean East. Hence, the scholars have applied the term 'Court Art' to identify the Mauryan architectural art.
- **Reflection of imperial grandeur:** The Mauryan art reflects the imperial grandeur; hence, the emphasis is on the massiveness rather than on spontaneity. The king and the court were both highly conscious of their power and imperial glory. Both Ashoka's inscription and Kautilya's *Arthasastra* point out to a highly

centralized administration supported by a high bureaucracy that consciously projected this fact. Moreover, the Mauryan art was an integral part of that ideology and historical reality. One of the important functions of the Mauryan art was to impress and over-awe the people and the majesty of the emperor. The compactness of animal figures with solid stone and stateliness of the columns are eloquent testimony to this exhibitionism.

- **Vehicle of internationalism:** Ashoka's role in contemporary history was to bring India in the orbit of the international culture in order to raise her from mere tribalism to internationalism of the contemporary world. So, Ashoka adopted this art style for propagation of his policy, particularly *Dhamma*.

The Mauryan art is a reflection of personal will of the imperial ruler, mainly Ashoka. It is an assimilation of Indian Hellenistic and Achaemenid ideals and developed out of individualistic taste and ideology. Not out of a collective social will, Ashoka's personal religion and his concept of *Dhamma*, or the policy of *Dhamma Vijaya*, all reflects individual reality. The Maurya court art is also essentially individualistic in character. Ashoka not only adopted a permanent material for art but also raised art, ranging from mere handicrafts to monumental art, which was determined by individual will, taste and preferences. Thus, it stands aloof and apart and it failed to merge into main stream of the Indian art.

2.5 POPULAR ART

Apart from the court art, the Mauryan period witnessed the development of popular indigenous art. After the death of Ashoka, the imperial workshops produced cult statues characterized by highly polished *chunar* limestone.

2.5.1 Yaksha/Yakshi

The primary representation of Mauryan popular art includes a group of *Yaksha* (see Figure 2.8) and *Yakshi* (semi-God or demi-God) associated with fertility. *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* are massive sculptures with smooth polished surface, resembling the Mauryan pillar. In this context, the Didarganj *Yakshi* is of significance. The Maurya pillars and the *Yaksh/Yakshi* sculptures, although have a smooth lustre, yet they sharply differ from each other. According to Stella Kramrisch, a renowned Art historian, the *Yaksha*/*Yakshi* group represented an archaic indigenous tradition and is associated with Indus cultural remains, while the pillars are more sophisticated and inspired by the court.

Fig. 2.8 *A Yaksha*

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Check Your Progress

9. Classify Mauryan art.
10. What inspired the major art style of the Mauryan period?
11. List any two characteristic features of the Mauryan court art.
12. State the historical forces that led to the development of the Mauryan court art.

NOTES

Other specimens of the Mauryan popular art consist of the famous freestanding stone figures from Besnagar and Parkham. Although of archaic aspect and designed from a frontal viewpoint with flattened sides, they represented a relatively advanced art and imply a long anterior development and practise. These stone figures are magnificently conceived and are informed by an astounding physical energy, which is their archaic 'stiffness'. This form of art was used to serve the ends of passionate devotion (*bhakti*) to spiritual and unseen powers and probably for the exposition of cosmic theory in terms of an elaborate theology; this same energy finds expression in the early *Kusana* Buddhas and survives even in the more refined creations of the Gupta age.

Female *chauri*-bearer, found in the Patna Museum (Bihar) and a *Yakshi* in a seated posture at Mathura, worshipped under the name of Manasa Devi, represent the popular school of Mauryan art. The upper part of a colossal male figure from Baroda near Parkham is even more massive and archaic than any of the other figures; the complete statue must have been over 12 feet in height. These massive sculptures fully illustrate and adequately establish the character of the indigenous school of the Mauryan period.

Figure 2.9 shows the Didarganj *Yakshi* or Didarganj *chauri*-bearer, which is one of the finest examples of Mauryan art.

Fig. 2.9 *Didarganj Yakshi in Patna Museum*

Likewise, a series of statues with all the characteristics of the imperial workshop of Pataliputra has also been discovered at Palwal near Mathura and in Sopara near Mumbai, the *Yaksha* king *Manibhadra* at Baroda, two statues at Pawaya, and finally, the goddess *Sri Lakshmi* at Besnagar (Vidisa). Their modelling is very archaic, where the bodies are hardly lifted out of the stone block, the dress touches the pedestal, the feet hardly emerge from under the costume, the arms are pressed to the body and the head is hardly distinguishable from a broad neck with thick hair. However, some art historians consider freely modelled statues like that of Besnagar *Lakshmi* and the Didarganj *Yakshi* probably belonged to a later date and were probably linked up with Mathura school.

Two *Tirthankar* statues, discovered from Lohanipur (presently at the Patna Museum), were probably contemporaneous with the Sonbandhar Jain Cave at Rajgir and may have belonged to the late Mauryas. Interestingly, a number of Sphinx heads

found at Sankisa, Bhilsa and Mathura seems to be of Mauryan origin; their ram horns are inspired by the representations of Alexander the Great, though via the art of the Ptolemies of Egypt.

Hermann Goetz in his book, *Five Thousand Years of Indian Art*, made an interesting study. He has referred to a commentator of *Patanjali* who mentions that the last Mauryas sold the images of non-Vedic gods like *Siva, Skandha* and *Visakha* in order to replenish their treasury. Such statues were found just near the capitals of new states like Padnavati (Pawaya) and Mathura, which created an impression that this sale of idols had in fact been a sort of investiture. Moreover, the practice seems to have been followed also by the Sunga and Kanva emperors.

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2.6 MISCELLANEOUS ARTS

Some of the diverse forms of art prevailing during the Mauryan period are discussed in this section.

2.6.1 Terracotta Figurines

The ancient site of Pataliputra has yielded some important terracotta figurines pertaining to the Mauryan period. They usually represented the complete posture of dancing girls and boys.

They are totally different in character. They are large, smooth and luminous, and sensuous.

The Mauryan period ushered a change in the technique where the face is pressed from moulds and the body is modelled by hand, and both the parts are joined before firing. This certainly is a spectacular phenomenon in the evolution of Indian terracotta art, particularly in contrast to primitive and timeless type of the pre-Mauryan period.

Another important observation made by Sir John Marshall on the Mauryan art is that the sculptor was bound by the law of frontality, i.e., considering the composition from only one point.

Figure 2.10 shows a female terracotta figurine of the Mauryan period.

Fig. 2.10 *Female Terracotta figurine of the Mauryan Period*

Check Your Progress

13. State the primary representation of Mauryan popular art.
14. State the purpose of popular art.

NOTES

These terracotta figurines have been found from the lowest, or nearly the lowest levels at several widely separated sites, extending from Pataliputra to Takshasila. These moulded plaques and modelled heads and busts represent in most cases a standing female divinity, with very elaborate coiffures (hair style), dresses in a tunic or nude to the waist, and with a dhoti or skirt of muslin. The terracotta figures from Bulandibagh near Patna are worth mentioning.

This terracotta technique is stylistic and almost always typical; though made from moulds, few or no duplicates are met with, and there is a great variety of detail. In some cases, the figure is endowed with real grace, foreshadowing, and as Sir John Marshall remarks, 'the free and naturalistic development of the succeeding century'. A much more refined type of terracotta found at Pataliputra, and in particular the smiling child from that site, seems at first sight to belong to another and far more advanced school; but not only are similar types of head dress recognizable, a careful comparison with the less individualized types reveals an ethnic relation, and the refinement and sensitiveness that at first might suggest the working of some external influence may be only the result of local conditions.

Another notable product of the Mauryan art is the elephant figure, carved in high relief in the proximity of the rock-edict, at Dhauli, Orissa (see Figure 2.11). A pedestal inscription bearing the legend 'the best of elephants' reveals its identity with the Buddha. Sculptured in massive proportions, the elephant is full of life. The sculptor is able to convey the idea of peace and the gentleness of the Buddha through the nimble gait and half closed eyes of the elephant.

Fig. 2.11 *The Stone Elephant at Dhauli*

Figure 2.12 shows a statuette of the Mauryan period.

Fig. 2.12 *Mauryan Statuette of 2nd Century BCE*

Maurya painting seems to have reached a rather high standard from the drawing of an elephant by the side of Ashoka's Kalsi rock edict. Mauryan pottery is characterised by a highly polished black surface.

2.7 CONSTRAINTS OF MAURYAN ART

Some of the limitations of the Mauryan art are as follows:

- Had no roots
- Was artificial
- Projected a decadent style
- Failed to create any tradition
- Instrument of propaganda

It is important to note the major constraints of the Maurya court art. Firstly, it had no deep roots, either in the collective will of the people or in the soil in which it was introduced.

Secondly, its character no doubt was Indian, but in spite of its Indian character and superior quality, it was an artificial art form, imposed from above, totally detached from spontaneity. The Mauryan art did not express joy of feeling of the people but it only glorified monarchy and the court.

NOTES

Thirdly, the exotic and imperialist art of the Mauryas failed to create a tradition. The Maurya pillared halls and palaces failed to capture the imagination of Indian builders and architects. Moreover, the massive pillars and majestic art forms failed to impress the artists.

Fourthly, the Mauryan art disappeared because it only projected a decadent style. Plastic experience that had outlived the Achaemenid art was the last phase of the art of Asiatic west.

H. Herzfeld in his book, *Iran in the Ancient East*, points out that the charred emliers were transported to India, and with the fall of Mauryas, this style passed away rather unceremoniously as it met an unheralded end. Although Persian influence was actually felt in India after the Mauryan period, there is no reason to infer that any of these parallels or borrowing connotes a religious, social or political dependence of Northern India on Persia.

Fifthly, under the Mauryas, art was controlled to serve the purpose of the government in propagating its political ideals, and in this process, the Mauryas neglected the indigenous traditions to blossom properly. Hence, during and after the Maurya phase, a silent resentment was crystallizing against all that the Mauryas and their court stood for the precluded continuation of Mauryan art. Thus, Sunga art, which followed Maurya art formally and spiritually, was a negation of the Maurya art and attitude. The reliefs of Bharhut provide a panorama of contemporary Indian life complete with joys, sorrows and aspirations.

Human form, which was conspicuously absent in Mauryan art, thus, entered the domain of Indian art. It was a breakthrough and the inadequacy of Mauryan art that had paved the way for its development. Stella Kramrisch, a renowned art historian, thus, rightly observes that in the panorama of Indian art the importance of Mauryan art is rather marginal. In fact, it was an isolated phenomenon and a passing phase in the history of Indian art. It facilitated the indigenous tradition to restore to -their right places once again in a newer perspective. Some scholars, therefore, viewed the Mauryan art in terms of episodic model of art history which stands for a historical situation in which an art form is seen. Some scholars also have viewed Mauryan art as a 'glass house plant' brought from different ecological zones and fed on artificial manure. It grew without drawing its proper food from the local soil and faded away without leaving behind any worthwhile legacy.

Check Your Progress

15. Briefly describe the terracotta figurines of the Mauryan period.
16. How does the elephant figure at Dhauli, Orissa, resemble the Buddha?
17. List some constrains of the Mauryan period.
18. Which form was conspicuously absent in Mauryan art?

2.8 SUMMING UP

- The aspects and modes of visual art expression in India's rich cultural heritage strongly flourished during the Mauryan Empire.
- Some of the famous *stupas* pertaining to the Mauryan period are the *stupas* of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.
- One of the famous *chaityas* built probably during the Mauryan period is in the Lomas Rishi caves in Barabar hills in Gaya district, Bihar. Others are found in Bhaja caves in Pune, followed by Karla, Nasik and Ajanta in West India.
- Earliest historical examples of painting are noted in Yogimara caves in Ramgarh hills (Madhya Pradesh) where a few rows of human figures in yellow ochre and earth colour have been painted.

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- Chandragupta Maurya, the founder of the Mauryan Empire and the first emperor to unify most of Greater India into one state, displaced the last king of the Nanda dynasty around 320 BC and made himself the master of Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha.
- Chandragupta's grandson Ashoka (272 – 232 BC), who in his early life might have been following Brahminism, Jainism or possibly *Magianism*, later in life became an ardent Buddhist.
- For propagating Buddhism, Ashoka built *stupas* and erected pillars. He also erected rock-cut sanctuaries in the Barabar and Nagarjuni Hills. Moreover, his palace at Pataliputra had some of his spectacular creations.
- The special characteristic of the Ashokan work was the fine finishing and polishing of the surface, conspicuous even in the case of the excavated monastic halls.
- The major art style of the Mauryan period was inspired and fostered by the court. The major specimen of Mauryan court art includes the remains of the royal palace and the city of Pataliputra.
- The most important element in Mauryan court art is the Maurya pillar. The Mauryas gave up perishable materials like wood and brick, and purposely adopted stone as a medium of art for permanence and massiveness.
- Ashoka constructed about thirty pillars in various parts of his empire. According to Percy Brown, Ashoka erected these pillars to mark and commemorate the ancient Buddhist pilgrim route, which existed between Bodh Gaya at one end and Lumbini at the other.
- The most important segment of the Ashokan pillar is its capital. The principal shape is that of a bell, and this is brought about by elongated lotus petals falling gracefully all alike in a natural wavy motion.
- Mauryan pillars are highly polished, tall and well-proportioned columns. They are mostly made up of *chunar* or grey sandstone, 40–50 feet in height.
- After the death of Ashoka, the imperial workshops produced cult statues characterized by highly polished *chunar* limestone.
- The primary representation of Mauryan popular art includes a group of *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* (semi-God or demi-God) associated with fertility.
- The ancient site of Pataliputra has yielded some important terracotta figurines pertaining to Mauryan period. They usually represented complete posture of dancing girls and boys.
- The Mauryan art did not express joy of feeling of the people but it only glorified monarchy and the court.
- Under the Mauryas, art was controlled to serve the purpose of the government in propagating its political ideals, and in this process, the Mauryas neglected the indigenous traditions to blossom properly.

2.9 KEY TERMS

- **Mauryan pillar:** An important structure of the Mauryan art which bears the edicts of Emperor Ashoka.

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- **Court art:** The major art style of the Mauryan period, inspired and fostered by the court.
- **Achaemenid art:** Art related to the ruling dynasty of Persia from about 550 BCE to 330 BCE.
- **Terracotta:** Fired earthenware of a grey, buff or reddish colour used since prehistoric times to make sculptures and figurines.
- **Popular art:** Apart from court art, a popular indigenous art form characterized by highly polished c*hunar* limestone during the Mauryan period.

2.10 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. Visual arts can be classified as follows:
   - Architecture
   - Sculpture
   - Painting
   - Terracotta
2. Some of the famous *stupas* pertaining to the Mauryan period are the *stupas* of Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda.
3. Terracotta art can be divided into:
   - **Primitive form (or ageless):** It is mainly done in appliqué technique with simple pressure of hand.
   - **Stylized form (or time bound):** In this form, variation comes where moulds were used.
4. The word *chaitya* initially implied shrine, but in the course of time, it became a place of worship, and thus evolved the concept of *chaitya griha* – a hall in which a *chaitya* or a *stupa* occupies an important place. The *chaitya grihas* are mostly rock-cut architecture. These *chaityas* were built by both Buddhists and Jains.
5. Chandragupta Maurya was the founder of the Mauryan Empire and the first emperor to unify most of Greater India into one state.
6. During the Mauryan period, Ashoka appointed *dharmamahamatras* (special officers) to look after the moral condition of the people, to suppress many of the primitive religious customs, to discourage the slaughter and sacrifice of animals, and to encourage the foundation of charitable institutions.
7. The special characteristic of the Ashokan work was the fine finishing and polishing of the surface, conspicuous even in the case of the excavated monastic halls.
8. The most important monument of the Mauryan art is the Mauryan pillars.
9. The Mauryan art can be classified as follows:
   - Court art
   - Popular art
   - Miscellaneous art
10. The major art style of the Mauryan period was inspired and fostered by the court. The major specimen of Mauryan court art includes the remains of the royal palace and the city of Pataliputra.

11. The characteristic features of the Mauryan court art are as follows:
    - Its origin is controversial
    - It shows foreign influence
12. The historical forces that led to the development of the Mauryan court art are as follows:
    - Establishment of political suzerainty
    - Contact with the West Asiatic world
    - Influence of the Achaemenid School of Art
    - Hellenistic (Greek) influence
13. The primary representation of Mauryan popular art includes a group of *Yaksha* and *Yakshi* (semi-God or demi-God) associated with fertility.
14. The popular form of art was used to serve the ends of passionate devotion (*bhakti*) to spiritual and unseen powers and probably for the exposition of cosmic theory in terms of an elaborate theology.
15. The terracotta figurines of the Mauryan period represented complete posture of dancing girls and boys. They are totally different in character. They are large, smooth and luminous, and sensuous.
16. The elephant figure of the Mauryan period, carved in high relief in the proximity of the rock-edict, at Dhauli, Orissa, reveals its identity with the Buddha. Sculptured in massive proportions, the elephant is full of life. The sculptor is able to convey the idea of peace and the gentleness of the Buddha in the nimble gait and half closed eyes of the elephant.
17. Some of the limitations of the Mauryan art are as follows:
    - It had no roots
    - Artificial
    - Projected a decadent style
    - Failed to create any tradition
    - Instrument of propaganda
18. Human form was conspicuously absent in Mauryan art. It entered the domain of Indian art after the Maurya phase.

2.11 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the basic components of the Mauryan pillar?
2. Write a short note on Yaksha and Yakshni.
3. Briefly explain Mauryan terracotta art.
4. What do you understand by polished stone sculpture?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the characteristic features of Mauryan pillars.
2. Write a critical note on West Asian influences on the Mauryan court art.
3. Do you think that indigenous roots of the Maurya court art have been under estimated in the process of projecting the alien impact on it?
4. Write a note on Mauryan popular art with special emphasis on Yaksha and Yakshi.

2.12 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 3 EARLY BUDDHIST ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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STRUCTURE

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Before answering the question 'what is Early Buddhist Art?', it is important to ask ourselves 'why Buddhism needed art?' During the lifetime of the Buddha, he and his disciples wandered from place to place to propagate his message among the people and increase the popularity of the newly formed Buddhist monastic order among the masses. It was only during the rainy season that the monks were allowed to stay at any place for a long duration. However, this scheme of things changed drastically after the *Mahaparinirvana* of the Buddha. Places associated with the important events of his life became places of pilgrimages and Buddha was deified. Another important feature of this period was the spread of Buddhist religion beyond its heartland of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh. This was achieved by royal patronage as provided by Ashoka, the Mauryan Emperor and the travels of the Buddhist monks to far off places along the important trade routes. These far-off places, wholly disconnected with the life of the Buddha were turned into Buddhist sacred places by the construction of *stupas* and interring within them relics of the Buddha's disciples and Buddhist creed. These investitures of sanctity to traditional non-Buddhist sites were further augmented by the establishment of Buddhist monasteries. The monks residing here carried out regular discourses on the Buddha's teachings and retold the of Buddha life story along with the stories of his previous life to impress upon the laity the significance of this new religion. In turn, the populace of the nearby settlements made donations of food and clothing for the sustenance of monks and their monastic establishments.

The practice of making donations to the monks also had the added benefit of securing religious merit for the donors. This symbiotic relation between the recluse monastic establishment and the secular settlement gradually outgrew each other's rudimentary requirements. In the grand scheme of things the humble establishments had

NOTES

to be improved and added upon so that their influence spread far and wide and with it came more donations. The close involvement of the trading community and the contemporary political class hastened this process of upgradation and structures of more permanent material and visual appeal began to emerge. Thus, we see the use of art in the service of Buddhism to increase its popularity and attract more and more laymen to its fold.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the early Buddhist art
- Outline the evolution of the Stupas of Buddhists
- Describe the art and architecture of Bharhut
- Trace the emergence of the sculptural art of Sanchi
- Discuss the rock cut caves of western India

3.2 EARLY BUDDHIST ART: AN INTRODUCTION

The single most important object of veneration among the Buddhists monks and laity was the *stupa*. While originally they were basically funerary structures, with the development of Buddhism, it became the symbol of the Buddha himself and gained sanctity as a sacred object of reverence. Since this was where people came to offer prayers, it had to shed its rudimentary character and assume a grandeur befitting its new found status. Furthermore, seeing that association with this noble objective was supposed to secure great merit, people flocked to donate wealth and even their services to this noble cause . Thus, the *stupa* became the focal point of early Buddhist artistic endeavour not only as an architectural form but also as an object that deserved sculptural art for its decoration. Early Buddhist art encompassed not only the architecture but also the craftsmanship that was employed to decorate it.

As mentioned above, the *stupa* was the earliest and undoubtedly the most important architectural contribution of Buddhism. However, it was certainly not the only. In western India, the rock-cut tradition of Bihar, especially the Barabara and Nagarjuni caves, was not only put to into the service of a religion but its rudimentary character was revised completely. Along the slopes of the Western Ghats, series after series of caves were excavated. These caves served two very distinct functions—prayer hall and residential units for the monks. The prayer halls were known as *chaitya* and it housed a stone-cut *stupa* as the main object of veneration. The residential suits comprising of small cells were known as the *vihara*.

Existing examples of *stupas* that preserve, even in their ruins, the beauty of early Buddhist art are from Sanchi and Bharhut in central India and Amravati in Andhra Pradesh. Rock cut caves of Western Ghats are found at a number of sites like Kondivite, Bhaja, Kondane, Nasik, Pitalkhora and Bedsa, all in Maharashtra.

(The architectural forms from different sites will be discussed in separate sections)

Early Buddhist sculptural art is found on the railing pillars and *toranas* as at Bharhut and exclusively on *toranas* as evidenced on the Great Stupa at Sanchi. In the

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rock cut caves of the Western Ghats, sculptures have been carved on the façade of the caves, ceilings, walls etc. the subject matter of these sculptural compositions were stories from the life of Sakyamuni Buddha, Jataka stories, i.e., stories of the previous birth of the Buddha, secular subjects like figures of *Yaksa-Yaksi*, mythological creatures, flora, fauna, devotees, monks, sacred Buddhist symbols etc. The most important aspect of the early Buddhist art is the spirit of 'aniconism'. The term 'aniconism' refers to the practice of depiction of a divinity in symbolic form and not in human or anthropomorphic form. In our case, the Buddha was not depicted in his human form. Instead his presence was suggested by the use of symbols like wheel, vacant throne, wooden sandals, umbrella, etc.

3.3 STUPAS: AN OVERVIEW

The beginning of Budddhist Architecture in a particular direction started with Mauryan emperor Ashoka. After seeing deaths and devastations in the Kalinga war in 255 B.C. He converted himself as a follower of Buddhism. To spread the teachings of Buddha, Ashoka used his official machinery effectively. In promotion of Dhamma, Ashoka utilized the rocks and constructed viharas, pillars, and stupas. These structures were the early form of Buddhist Art.

Ashokas' period is remarkable for iconic and symbolic expression of art as Ashoka was the follower of Thera cult of Buddhism, which strictly prohibit the construction of any figure or figure images of Buddha. So this phase of Indian art is known for the pre iconic expression of Buddhism. Same directives were followed by different dynasties before the Kushana period.

During his time Buddha never allowed any ritual, as emergence of Buddhism was itself a reaction of Brahmanical cult. At the time of Mauryan emperor Ashoka, mostly cult consisted mainly of visionary speculations and intangible abstraction which were not able to satisfy the public. So people were ready to accept such doctrine which were more substantial. In the period of religious vacuum, Buddhism redressed the void. Perceptions were the material object of veneration, like worship of sacred relics gave a great sense of relief to the people who were disillusioned and preplaced by unpleasant observations. Emperor Ashoka's Dhamma proved a peaceful ideology of life. It was assimilated by the common man and spread rapidly in remote areas and beyond his empire.

The changes in religious belief in the country also came as a marked advance in art and architecture. Buddhism as an essential graphic creed art became its handmaid, so wherever it was exerted it was accompanied by forms and symbols. Early Buddhist art was the product of Ashoka's personal efforts and predictions. But these early creations of Buddhist art and architecture were confined within seemingly narrow limits. The importance of this period lies in the fact that it marks the beginning of an era when India through the teaching of Buddha threw new rays in the field of religion, symbol and art all over Asia.

Earliest phase of Buddhist art is defined as aniconic which means representation of Buddha's life through symbols such as an elephant, symbol of his birth, a Bodhi tree symbol of enlightenment and the wheel, as a representation of Dharmachakrapravartana (his first sermon). During this period sculptures were more explicit which was the symbolic representation of Buddha's morphological expression. Artists developed aniconic symbols which were carried out up to 200 CE in the southern parts of the country.

NOTES

Although some scholars believe that early Buddhist anthromorphic creations might be made of wood or some other material which was not durable. Such practices came into existence as it is mentioned in Digha Nikaya where Buddha discouraged representation of himself after the extinction of his life.

The early Buddhist art and architechture comprised of Vihara or Lena, Sangharama (Buddhist monastic complex) as a residence for monks, Stupas and Shrines. Several early Buddhist caves contained a Stupa as a centre and later on stupa also became the essential and integral part of Buddhist monasteries.

Stupa culture was popularized by Ashoka. It is believed that Ashoka constructed twenty four thousand stupas in the different parts of the country. The Stupa monasteries were situated near the urban centres along with major trade and pilgrimage routes. Most of the places were marked with life events of Buddha like Sarnath and Gaja. Mostly Stupa monasteries were constructed on the outskirts of the great cities of that time such as Sanchi, outside Vidisha, Mrigdava (Saarnath) close to Kashi.

Most Buddhist monastery sites were constructed over many centuries which show the gradual development of Sculpture and Architecture forms.

Stupas are the ancient paradigm of Indian Art. The tradition of Stupa building is older than the Buddhist religion. The term Stupa is derived from the Sanskrit word 'Stu' and 'Yup' which means to accumulate or to collect at one place. So this term is used for a clay mound. Amarkosh also mentioned the same. Buddhist scriptures dighhnikayAngular Nikay and Majhim Nikay also used the term "thup" in the same sense.

Some historians believe that 'Stupa' word came from 'tomb'. But this assumption is not valid. This is because tomb is used for keeping dead bodies whereas Stupa is considered to be a sacred place.

Stupa: Objective and Philosophical Analysis

At the time of Buddha's Mahaparinibhan (Death) his closest disciple Ananda asked him "How will we regard the relics of Tathagat?" Buddha replied "As it is made for the emperors on the chowks, in the same manner stupas should be made for Tathagat."

Through the literary and archaeological sources, it is very clear that Stupa cult was already in practice in Brahmanism and Jainism. In Rigveda flames of the fire pit are regarded as Stupa. Such kind of information is also mentioned in Mahavansha. Most of the Stupas reveal the scene of its worship to demonstrate the main events of Buddha's life, which were divided into four main icons.

(i) An Elephant (Symbol of Birth)

(ii) A Pipal Tree (Bodhi Vriksha) (Symbol of Enlightenment)

(iii) A Wheel (Symbol of Dharmachakrapravatran)

(iv) Stupa (Symbol of Mahaparinibhan)

The relation of Stupa with the end of life was very natural. After a cremation, relics were kept in an urn and on this Stupas were constructed. During his reign, Ashoka enshrined the existing Stupas into 84,000 new stupas. Huen Tsang also mentioned the same.

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Origin

How was the Stupa developed in the shape of an upturned bowl or oval shape? Where did it originate? It is a common notion in every religion that after death, the soul goes to heaven through the sky path. That next world is also imagined as the sky. This visible sky also looks like a half circle. It might be such kind of imagination that led to the origin of the Stupa.

The earliest Stupas were clay mould. So in Pali literature it is called as 'Thup' or 'Thuch'. In the period of Ashoka, stupas were made of bricks which decided its shape in oval form.

In Post Ashokan period, decorated Stupas became popular all over India.

Story of relics division

It is said that Emperor Ashoka took the relics from eight earlier constructed stupas. The gateway (toran) of Sanchi reveals a story of eight elephants carrying a casket on their head. This story is closely related to Buddhist literature. Mahatma Buddha got Mahaparinibhan at Kushinagar, capital of Mallas. So Mallas showed their right on the relics of Buddha. Other monarchs also wanted to take a fraction of this. Consequently a situation of war arose. Those who laid a claim on the relics were:

- Ajatshatru- Rajgrih
- Shakya- Kapil Vastu
- Buli- Alpakappa
- Koliya- Ramgram
- Malla- Pava
- Brahmins- Vetthadwip
- Lichchavi- Vaishali
- Malla- Kushinagar

Malla of Kushinagar refused the claim of others on the grounds of superiority of their land Kushinagar (where Buddha died). Due to the fear of war, Brahmin Drona suggested a solution according to which relics were divided into eight parts. Ultimately they got their fraction and returned to their homes. They all made Stupas. This scene is depicted on the gateways of Sanchi. Hoever such description is not found in Mahaparinibhan Sutla. So it is proved that Stupas were older than Ashoka's efforts.

Towards the middle of the second century BCE, a change becomes observable by this time when Buddhism had fully recovered from the removal of Ashoka's guiding hand. The order of Monks had developed into numerous and powerful monarchism having substantial resources. Apart from royal patronage, Buddhism had a large community following eager for piligrimage.

Types of Stupas

On the basis of the objective, Stupas can be divided into the following categories:

(i) **Relic Stupa:** Such stupas were built on the relics of Mahatma Buddha and his disciples. Relics like teeth, nails and hair sets.

(ii) **Object Stupa:** Stupa made for any particular object or purpose related to Buddha or his disciples; Sariputra Shipa of Sanchi is the best example of this category.

NOTES

(iii) **Commemorative Stupa:** This kind of Stupas were built to commemorate events of the lives of Mahatma Buddha and his disciples which comprised commodities of his daily life.

(iv) **Votive Stupa:** This category of stupas were constructed on any fulfillment or any wish of a devotee. So such stupas do not contain any relics or remains of Buddha. Earlier these stupas were small in size but with the increase in religious belief, their sizes also increased.

Architectural Features of a Fully Evolved Stupa

Originally, a stupa was a simple mud mound which gradually evolved into a grand structure. A fully evolved stupa comprises of the following individual parts- the *anda* or the hemispherical dome resting over a cylindrical drum or the *medhi*. The dome is surmounted by a solitary or a series of umbrellas known as the *chhatravali*. The central pole of the *chhatravali* i.e., the *yashti* is embedded in a stone base, the *harmika,* which in turn is surrounded by a square railing- *vedika*. Stupas were provided with two walking paths (*pradakshina patha*) one at the top and the other at the ground level. The upper walking path was on the top of the *medhi* and was approached by stairways (*sopana*). Both the walking paths were surrounded by stone railing (*vedika*). The *vedika* is also formed by a number of subsidiary parts. It comprises of a series of uprights called the *stambha* which were joined together by three cross-bars, one above the other, known as the *suchis*. The cross-bars are bi-convex or lenticular in section. The ends of the cross-bars were fitted into the sockets of the uprights. The entire composition was then crowned by a coping stone or the *ushnisha*. The coping stone has an inverted U-shaped or parabolic cross-section. They are provided with slots on the top for inserting metallic dowels that kept in place two adjacent coping stones. The bottom face of the coping stones was also provided with rectangular sockets into which fitted the upper ends of the uprights thus completing the entire arrangement of the railing. The entrance to the stupa enclosure was through one or more gateways known as the *toranas*. At most stupa sites what survives even today is only the plan of the stupa along with the remnants of the stone railing in varying degrees of preservation, as found from Bharhut.

3.4 ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF BHARHUT

The magnificence and grandeur of Bharhut stupa exists only in the galleries of museums in India and abroad. The site of the ancient *stupa* is located in district Satna, Madhya Pradesh. The archaeological ruins at the site were discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1873. Even during the time of its visit the site was desolate and the site was quarried for stones by the local populace. Cunningham started excavating the site in 1874 and the work was continued by his assistant Beglar. Seeing this wanton destruction and realizing the archaeological and artistic potential of the extant remains, Cunningham made arrangements for the removal of the surviving architectural pieces to Calcutta. At present, the largest collection of the Bharhut railing, constructed of red sandstone, is displayed in the Indian Museum, Kolkata in a specifically designed Bharhut Gallery. Some fragments are also displayed in the Allahabad Museum, Uttar Pradesh.

Check Your Progress

1. How did the stupa evolve into sacred objects?
2. What are the Jataka stories about?
3. What is aniconic art?
4. Who were the eight claimants of the Buddhist relics?

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Fig. 3.1 *Bharhut Gallery, Indian Museum, Kolkata*

The art of Bharhut presents a representative picture of the Sunga period art prevalent in the region. This is the first instance when such large scale artistic activity was undertaken and that too on large stone pieces. Examples of this art tradition are found on the large railing that surrounded the stupa at the ground level and the surviving example of *torana*, the gateway to the stupa. The sculptural representations found on the railing and the *torana* comprise numerous images of *Yaksa* and *Yaksi*, *Salabhanjikas*, Naga figures, mortal human beings depicted in different attitudes, Jataka stories, dwarves, etc. The most notable feature of this art tradition is the low relief or bas-relief of the sculptural depictions. The concept of relief refers to the degree to which the figures sculpted on the stone panel project out from the stone background into which it is carved. The Sunga art tradition as witnessed at Bharhut has very low relief, i.e., the figures appear to be on the stone surface, and there is not much depth from the surface of the sculpted figure to the surface of the surrounding stone mass. They appear flat as if compressed from the front. Another feature of the Bharhut sculptural panels was the difference in the scale of the participating figures. This was done to suggest the hierarchical standing of each individual. The Bharhut art specimens preserve examples of individual images as well as narrative panels.

Individual images

Of the several categories of individual images found on the railing pillars, some are described here both in respect of their artistic style and their iconographic features along with their symbolism. An important decorative motif in the early Buddhist art is the *Salabhanjika*. This motif represents a beautiful damsel in close association with a tree, more specifically the *sal* tree. The motif is the artistic representation of the indigenous pagan belief that beautiful women can make a *sal* tree blossom by the mere touch of her feet. Rooted in this myth is the concept of fertility both of nature as well as of the female. A pillar from the Bharhut railing depicts such a female standing atop a composite mythological animal. She is entwined with a tree, in this case an *ashoka* tree. Her left leg and hand are entwined along the shaft of the tree while her right hand clasps a branch over her head. The foliage of the tree is depicted bent around her head, thus creating a canopy like effect. The inscription on the pillar identifies the female figure as that of *Yaksi* Chandra.

While technically the term *salabhanjika* is applicable to a sculptural motif where the female figure is clasping exclusively a *sal* tree, in the present case the term '*ashoka dohada*' appears more befitting. The term *dohada* is a Prakrit word and means 'one having two hearts'. This term is applicable to a pregnant lady whose body contains her own heart as well as that of her unborn child. The concept of fertility so overwhelming

NOTES

in this is reflected in the flowering of the tree, the round breasts narrow waist, wide hips and the female holding a flowering branch close to her reproductive organs.

From the point of view of composition, very little free surface can be seen. The exaggerated sway of the figure, though unnatural, lends rhythm to the composition Attempts have been made to suggest sensuality of the entire motif with emphasis on fertility by the sway of the torso and the embrace of the tree shaft with both hands and legs. In keeping with the idea of a beautiful young woman, the figure has been decorated with a broad necklace having sacred Buddhist motif of the *triratna*. A multi-stringed long necklace dangles between her breasts. Her head is covered with a decorated scarf. Decorative motifs on the face suggest the practice of tattooing or face painting. While the upper part of the body is bare, the lower half is draped by a *dhoti*. There is no effort to suggest the volume of the drapery, instead its presence is suggested by flat pleats falling between the legs and knotted girdle at the waist. The inability to show depth has led to the peculiar treatment of the feet. The right one is turned outward showing only the profile and the left one is raised up on the toes, again in profile.

Fig. 3.2 *Tree Deity, Bharhut*

Of the male figures depicted on the railing posts, mention may be made of a warrior whose dress and appearance suggests him to be a Greek soldier. The upper part of the pillar is broken, but from the extant part it is clear that there was a half medallion above the soldier's head. The soldier is depicted standing in a full frontal pose, betrayed only by the three quarter profile of the face turned left and the splayed out feet in opposite directions. The foreign affiliation of the soldier is apparent in his exotic dress comprising of a moderately long tunic reaching below the waist, trousers and high boots ending just below the knees. The head is covered with short curls and surrounded by a head band the ends of which are depicted flowing behind his head. The soldier holds a broad blade sword in his left hand, which hangs down by the side of his leg and a plant in his right hand placed near his chest, possibly as an offering. Again the treatment of the drapery is very flat, its presence suggested by the lines on the ends and flat parallel pleats falling between the legs. The figure is very flat and has no suggestion of movement. The linear aspect of the carving is very much apparent in this figure.

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Fig. 3.3 *Greek Soldier, Bharhut*

Another pillar depicts an elephant procession. The procession consists of three elephant riders, the central one towering over the flanking figures. The man seated atop the central elephant holds an elephant goad in his right hand and a cylindrical box like object in his left hand, possibly as an offering. His aristocratic bearing is apparent in his knotted turban, a peculiarity of the Sunga style. The flanking figures are diminutive in comparison. This differential scale was possibly employed to suggest a hierarchy. The treatment is strictly frontal. Even though the scene represents a procession, there is no hint of movement in the treatment of either the riders or the mounts. The legs of all the three elephants are depicted in a straight line as if they are transfixed to their positions. Again in the central figure the proportion of the visible torso of the rider to the mammoth animal below is not maintained. The human figure appears to overwhelm the entire composition. In fact, far more styling of the body and suggestion of movement is found in the depiction of the two dwarf figures below.

Fig. 3.4 *Elephant Procession, Bharhut*

On the whole, the individual figures depicted on the railing pillars have some distinct characteristics. Each figure is marked by its individual features and no two

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figures are similar in their postures and attitudes. There are multitudes of details in each figure. However, this diversity of sculptural depictions fails to hide the almost similar facial contours. Without fail, nearly all sculptures have an oval shaped face, whether male or female, which tapers down to the chin. This facial treatment is found in the figures of the narrative panels as well. They have an almost almond shaped, broad flat nose, small mouth with comparatively thick lips.

Coming to the narrative scenes, most of them are depicted in the medallions of the railing posts. Most of the scenes tell the story of the previous lives of the Buddha, both in his human and animal incarnations. These tales of previous births are recorded in Jataka stories. Each of the narrative panel recounting such stories is labeled with inscriptions identifying their stories.

One such narrative panel tells the story of the Mahakapi Jataka. In this life, the Buddha-to-be was born as a monkey Bodhisattva, who was the king of an eighty thousand strong group of monkeys and they lived in a forest. It so happened that a king along with his entourage came to the forest. The monkey Bodhisattva, in order to save his subjects stretched himself as a bridge between two trees on the opposite banks of the river. The monkeys crossed over one by one to the safety of the opposite bank. The last to cross over was a wicked monkey, an incarnation of his wicked human cousin Devadatta. Devadatta deliberately jumped on the Bodhisattva's back and broke it. In the sculptured panel, the diverse elements of the story, the forest setting, the crossing of the river, the king and his retinue and the final discourse between the human king and the monkey king are beautifully delineated. Two trees on either side suggest the forest setting of the story. A river cutting diagonally across the medallion serves as a dividing line. The water in the river is suggested by wavy lines and the presence of fishes. Above the river, the Bodhisattva monkey is depicted stretched over between the two trees and monkeys crossing over. Below it two attendants from the king's retinue appear stretched over a cloth to provide shade to the monkey king and the human king who are depicted seated on stools below the tree. The attendant by the side of the seated Bodhisattva monkey is depicted in complete form. However, his counterpart near the king is depicted only with his head to suggest his figure is covered behind the king. The panel within its limited space has a number of activity spots going on simultaneously, but no single event is overpowering the other. This balance of crowding several elements, yet maintaining the individuality of each stage of the story is a remarkable quality of Bharhut art.

Fig. 3.5 *Mahakapi Jataka, Bharhut*

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Another medallion depicts the event of the purchase of the grove of Prince Jeta by trader Anathapindaka of Sravasti and its subsequent donation to the Buddhist *sangha*. This panel depicts an event from the life of Sakyamuni Buddha. The account of the purchase of the grove reserved in Buddhist lore states that when the wealthy trader Anathapindaka approached Prince Jeta to sell his land, the latter demanded that he will part with it only at the cost of covering the entire area of the grove with coins. The left hand of the medallion depicts three trees representing the physical setting of the episode. Four male figures, possibly servants of Anatahpindaka, are depicted loading coins from a bullock cart and placing them on the ground to cover it. The cart along with the unlocked bullock is also depicted in the right half. The centre of the medallion depicts two standing male figures, one above the other. The lower figure facing front but having his left hand pointing to the right appears to be Prince Jeta while the figure above him, holding a water vessel pointed to the right appears to be the trader. The positioning of the two figures suggests a division in the narrative sequence of the medallion. The right half depicts two residential structures, possibly denoting the transformation of the secular grove into the monastic complex for the Buddha and his *sangha*. The depiction of the Bodhi tree is a further indication of the newly acquired Buddhist affiliation of the site. A group of people, possibly devotees, with hands folded in adoration are depicted along the periphery to the right.

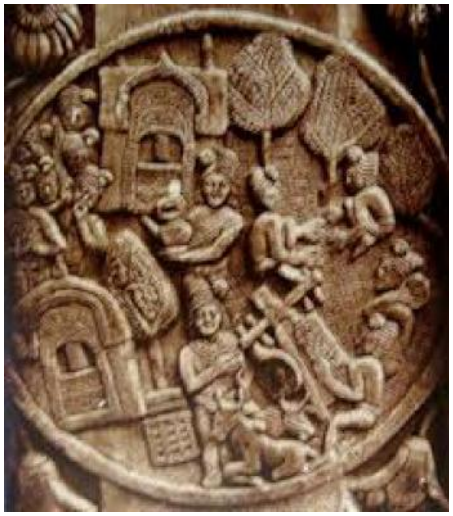

Fig. 3.6 *Purchase of Jetavana by Anathapindaka, Bharhut*

Here again one cannot but praise the compositional skill of the craftsmen at Bharhut who could so ably depict the entire story having two different time frames. Another characteristic of Bharhut specimens that can equally be applied to all spheres of Indian art is the centrality accorded to the delivery of the religious message without caring much for the realism. This leads to selective grading of the individual figures. Comparatively larger sizes are reserved for the main players of a scene.

3.5 SCULPTURAL ART OF SANCHI

The story of the rise and growth of Sanchi as a sacred pilgrimage site is almost analogous to the growth of Buddhism under Ashoka. It is said that Ashoka constructed a modest stupa at the hilltop of Sanchi and also erected a pillar there to commemorate his association with this region. It is said that his wife Devi belonged to nearby Vidisha and that she was

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a devout Buddhist. The humble Buddhist site established by Ashoka grew in grandeur under the Sungas and the Satavahanas. The site received patronage even under the Gupta rulers who were devout Bhagawats. The site continued to survive actively till the 13th century AD. The Buddhist establishment as it survives today in Sanchi comprises of three stupas, monasteries, Mauryan pillar, Buddhist shrines datable to the Gupta period and a number of free standing votive images of the Buddha and others of the Buddhist pantheon.

Examples of Early Buddhist art are preserved on the railing of Stupa II and in the *toranas* of the Great Stupa. In the *torana*, the two pillar uprights and the three architraves joining them at the top are the primary canvas on which the early specimens of Buddhist art are carved.

3.5.1 Stupa I or the Great Stupa

The Stupa I at Sanchi is one of the biggest and grandest of all existing Buddhist structures in the country. The structure of the present stupa hides within it the remains of the earliest stupa at the site which was constructed by Emperor Ashoka. The humble mud structure, possibly surrounded by a wooden railing was enlarged substantially during the later Sunga period, around the second half of the first century BC, and its existing size measuring thirty six meters in diameter was achieved. It was in this period that the stupa got its stone casing and the large stone *vedika* surrounding it. However, there is no indication to suggest whose relics were interred in the stupa core. Other innovations that were carried out in the Sunga period were the small stone railings at the top of the stupa. This railing encloses a three tiered stone umbrella receding in size as it rises up. An upper walking path enclosed by stone railing and accessed by a double stairway was also added during this period. During the beginning of the Satavahana period the entire composition was further embellished with the erection of the *toranas*, one in each cardinal direction. The combination of the ground railing and the *toranas* are a study in contrast with respect to their surface embellishment. While the railing is devoid of any ornamentation, the *toranas* seldom have any vacant stone surface not overflowing with carved motifs. The Great Stupa at Sanchi is the perfect example of the fully developed stupa form incorporating all the architectural elements in complete harmony.

Of the four *toranas*, the one on the south is presumed to be the first to be erected. The inscription on the pillar states that a part of it was gifted by the foreman of artists of Sri Satakarni. This Sri Satakarni is identified as the third ruler of the Satavahana dynasty, Satakarni I.

Fig. 3.7 *Great Stupa, Sanchi*

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Sculptural Art of the Great Stupa

The sculptural depictions on the *toranas* of the Great Stupa are a virtual panorama of Buddhist symbols, mythological motifs, semi-divinities, animal figures, floral motifs, the narrative panels etc. The pillar uprights have capital-like sculptures in the form of addorsed figures which serve the purpose of symbolizing the end of the pillars and the beginning of the superstructure. The pillars on the *toranas* on the north and the east directions have addorsed figures of elephants, dwarves on the western entrance and lions on the south. The elephants are conceived as part of a procession suggested by the presence of riders atop each animal. Only the fore parts of the animals are delineated. However, though the composition of the elephants suggests their participation in a procession, the attitude of the front legs of the animals suggest that they are standing still. Coming to the addorsed dwarves, they are depicted standing with both their hands raised above as if upholding the superstructure of the architraves. Their pendulous belly and muscular hands and feet are suggestive of their inherent strength. Each of the four dwarves has been treated distinctly with respect to their facial features and their dress.

Fig. 3.8 *Dwarves on the Pillars of Western Torana, Great Stupa, Sanchi*

Among the auspicious motifs depicted on the architraves, mention may be made of the sacred *Triratna* symbol and the three dome. While the sacred symbol is befittingly carved in the round on the top of the architects, the three damsels are represented as bracket figures literally hanging from the bottom tier of the architrave. These sculptural motifs highlight the progression of art style from those encountered on the Bharhut railings. The Sanchi examples are completely carved in the round, though their frontal appearance is quite apparent. The element of sensuousness is obvious in the voluptuousness of the figures. All the flat linear projections of the early style have been left far behind by the greater and refined modelling of the human body. The bodies are scantily clad but with usual ornamentation. The flowering of the trees with flowers and fruits suggest the original concept of fertility and abundance. The vitality of life and the force of creation is subtly exhibited in these female forms. These figures symbolise with them the entwining of the spiritual and the sensual in balanced form.

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Fig. 3.9 *Tree Deity, Great Stupa, Sanchi*

Another group of figures regularly repeated on the inner faces of the *torana* pillars are standing figures of male attendants in varying poses. All the figures are treated individually for the facial features, dress and attitudes. These male figures are characterized by the rounded contours of the body, apparent fleshiness, diaphanous drapery and softness of modeling. As suggested by their individual style of drapery we have an example of the foreign soldier on the western gateway.

Fig. 3.10 *Male Figure on the Inner Face of the Torana Pillars, Great Stupa, Sanchi*

The pillars and the architraves have numerous depictions of sculptural panels delineating Jataka stories and events from the life of the Buddha and events after his *Mahaparinirvana*. Of the Jataka stories mention may be made of the representation of the Mahakapi Jataka. In contrast to such representations on the Bharhut railing we find that at Sanchi they are not accompanied by label inscriptions. This would suggest that by the time of the carving of the Sanchi panels, such stories had become quite popular among the masses and hence did not require labeling for their identification.

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The architraves of the Sanchi *toranas* depict various events connected with the life of the Buddha as well as the events that occurred after his death like Prince Siddharth's renunciation of his palace life, enlightenment at Bodhgaya, conversion of the fire worshipping Kasyapas, departure of King Bimbisara from Rajgriha, War of Relics after the Buddha's death, scenes of Paradise, etc. In these depictions, the entire stone surface is covered with carvings. The individual figures appear to be jostling each other for space and attention. In contrast to the reliefs of Bharhut, here at Sanchi, the individual figures appear to move out of the stone matrix and can be visualized almost in the round. The figures cast deep shadows suggesting their high relief. The human figures when depicted in large numbers are placed in rising vertical tiers; each row appears to be standing on the shoulders of those below. The availability of a large space in the form of the rectangular architraves helped the Sanchi craftsmen to tell their story with greater detail by the inclusion not only of human characters, but also creating the backdrop of each event; be it palace interiors, gatehouses, fortification walls of large cities, etc.

The master craftsman at Sanchi utilized a number of narrative devices to help provide a continuous rendition of the story from the beginning to the end. In this pursuit, the elongated rectangular architraves provided the perfect backdrop. Thus is the scene of the Great Departure or *Mahabhinishkramana*; the presence of Prince Siddhartha, though not physically represented, has been suggested a number of times to show the progression of the story from one point in time to the other. The inception of the storyline is from one end where from the backdrop of the gates of the city of Kapilavastu, surrounded by a moat and buildings within, is the depiction of a horse leaving with an umbrella on top. The riderless horse suffices for the presence of Prince Siddhartha. The horse represented in the scene is obviously Kanthaka. The horse is depicted being held aloft by the people accompanying the procession. The depiction of the horse is repeated a number of times to suggest his journey till the other end of the architrave. This end has a depiction of a pair of *padukas*, to suggest the completion of Prince Siddhartha's renunciation of his worldly life and the beginning of his life as an ascetic. Under this, we see a horse without the umbrella being led back to the palace. The horse is depicted again at the bottom of the architrave. The animal now faces the opposite direction to suggest the beginning of his return journey back to Kapilavastu. Here the horse is depicted without the presence of the umbrella indicating that he no longer carries the Buddha on his back.

The sculptural exuberance at Sanchi states emphatically the objective of the craftsmen to portray life in all its myriad forms as he observes the nature around him. The impressive array of trees, flowers, fruits, animals, birds, etc. that abound at Sanchi have been delineated not from a naturalistic point of view, but each for their individual beauty that inspired the artist's mind to infuse the beauty of the nature into his own art work and thus in his own way offer something to the Buddhist way of life.

3.5.2 Stupa II

Another early structural component of the Buddhist establishment at the site is Stupa II. From the evidence of inscriptions found on reliquaries in the stupa they contained bone fragments of some famous Buddhist monks who preached during the Mauryan period and had also participated in the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra convened by Emperor Ashoka himself. Although the interred mortal remains of the monks are datable to the Mauryan period, more specifically from the reign of Ashoka, the stupa however, was constructed during the Sunga period only. The stupa comprises of a low flat topped dome resting over a low pedestal. The access to the drum of the stupa was on the east

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by a flight of steps. The pedestal was not surrounded by a *vedika*. At the ground level, enclosing the walking path, there is a stone railing with opening in each cardinal direction. The shape of the railing is elliptical instead of round. This is due to the elongation of the east-west axis to accommodate space for the steps leading to the top of the pedestal on the east. The ground railing together with the entrances aligned along the cardinal directions form a *swastika* plan.

Fig. 3.11 *Stupa II, Sanchi*

Sculptural Art at Stupa II

While architecturally the Stupa II at Sanchi is more recent than the Great Stupa, yet from the point of view of sculptural art, the carvings of the former are older in point of time. The railing of Stupa II has carvings on the interior as well as the exterior surface. The corner pillars have carvings on then three faces. The carvings on the rest of the railing pillars comprise full medallions in the centre and half medallions on the bottom and the top. The medallions are carved with Buddhist symbols, secular decorative motifs and most abundantly, lotuses. The early antecedence of the carving on this stupa is reflected in their shallow relief which does not appear to come out of the parent stone matrix. In this respect, the artistic style appears even more rudimentary than that observed at Bharhut. The stone carving at Sanchi Stupa II represents the general feature of Sunga art style with respect to its flatness and absolutely no suggestion of body contouring. The significance of the evidence that we gather from Stupa II is the fact that the inspiration for such large scale stone carving that had its beginning in the Sunga period came from wood and ivory carving that enjoyed wide popularity in the earlier period.

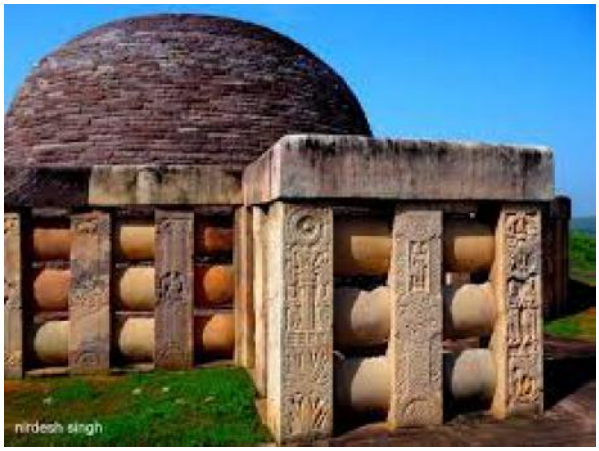

Fig. 3.12 *Scuptural Reliefs on the Pillars of Railing of Stupa II, Sanchi*

Check Your Progress

5. What is the most notable feature of the art of Bharhut?
6. What does the sculptural exuberance at Sanchi indicate about the intent of the craftsmen?

3.6 ROCK CUT CAVES OF WESTERN INDIA

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The rock cut caves of Western Ghats are an important aspect of the study of not only Buddhist architecture, but in general of Indian architecture as a whole. The history of rock-cut architecture is about a thousand years old and begins as early as the second century BC at Bhaja and Ajanta and culminates into the newest caves at Ellora.

Method of Excavating Caves

The workmen excavated the caves from the vertical face of the Deccan Trap and carried it into the depths of the rock matrix by a considerable extent. The presence of some unfinished caves at Ajanta and other sites help us to understand the entire process of excavating and decoration of the caves and thus helps us to appreciate the engineering skill present even in those days. The excavation process after the selection of suitable rock mass began with the tracing of the outline of the façade of the structure. Thereafter, the actual chiseling of the rock surface started at the level of the ceiling and this was carried deep into the rock mass to the desired depth. After having created a tunnel like space with the ceiling above, the workmen continued down, chiseling away rock mass to create space and retaining wherever the extant pieces were to be fashioned into pillars, walls etc. The entire process of excavating, dressing and carving of decorative motif was carried on simultaneously. This multi-dimensional work carried out at the same time ensured that no additional supports were required to be erected. The un-cut rock mass below provided a stable base to work with ease. Thus, basically the entire rock cut structure resembled a work of art on a large scale.

Architectural Style

These rock cut structures were fashioned as an imitation of wooden structures and other perishable materials like thatch that may have been widely prevalent in the different regions. These caves preserve in their architectural motifs not only the structure and dimensions of the free standing constructions, but their zest for absolute recreation led them to chisel out even such features like the tilt of the pillars, nail heads, imitation of wooden curved beams on the vaulted roof and rafters etc, which have no logical explanation for their existence in a rock cut structure. Despite their low architectural value to the rock cut sanctuaries, they are important for the study of wooden structures of the past.

1. Kondivite

The *chaitya griha* at Kondivite is dated to 100 BC. As per plan the prayer hall has a long rectangular assembly hall which leads to the small circular area housing the stupa through a narrow vestibule. Unfortunately, the façade is no more extant. There is a round walking path between the wall of the *stupa* chamber and the *stupa* itself. The wall of the circular *stupa* chamber has latticed windows on either side of the entrance doorway.

2. Bhaja

At the hill site of Bhaja (district Poona), 22 caves were excavated for the use of the Buddhist establishment there. The earliest caves that were excavated at the site was around the second century BC. The latest excavation at the site was towards the end of the second century AD based on paleographical evidence. However, the site remained in occupation till the fifth, sixth centuries AD when the wall surface was embellished with painted figures of the Buddha.

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Chaitya hall

The *chaitya* hall at Bhaja is a large hall with a vaulted roof and an apsidal end. The hall was divided longitudinally by two colonnades into a broad central nave and two lateral aisles. The apsidal end of the hall accommodated a solid rock cut stupa. The apsidal end and the lateral aisles were part of the composition to provide space for the rock cut stupa, an essential element of adoration. The façade of the Bhaja *chaitya* as we see it today was evidently not its original form. Originally, it is surmised that the façade had a finished and carved wooden screen. The presence of mortise holes on the extant rock surface provide a further attestation to the presence of some sort of wooden façade that has fallen victim to the vagaries of time.

The ceiling of the hall has closely placed curved stone ribs that continue into the apsidal end in imitation of wooden rafters. The pillars of the colonnades also show a tilt in their upper parts again suggesting the overwhelming influence of wooden structures. The present appearance suggests an austere appearance without any embellishments.

The rock cut stupa in the apse of the *chaitya* is a hemispherical dome placed over a cylindrical drum. The dome is surmounted by double railing, one on top of the other. This stone *harmika* originally enclosed a wooden umbrella now no more extant. The presence of a socket for receiving the wooden shaft of the umbrella helps us to visualize the original composition of the stupa.

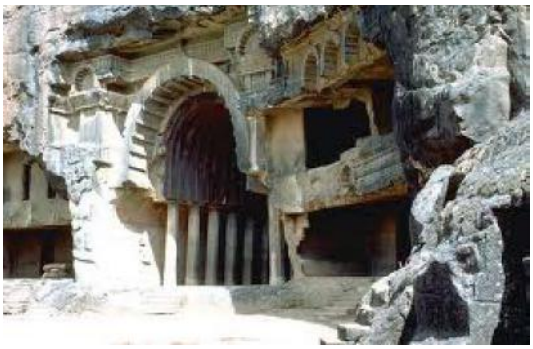

Fig. 3.13 *Bhaja Cave, Façade of the Chaitya Griha*

Vihara

Of the residential caves at the site, Cave 18 may be taken to be a representative example. The rock cut excavation of the *vihara* comprises of an astylar hall with a pillared verandah in the front. The verandah has a cell to its right and a recess to the left. The hall itself has a bench on the left side and two cells along the back wall on the right side. This *vihara* is also important for varied surface embellishment in the form of sculptural art.

The pillars in this cave are both plain and decorated. The pillars are square below and above and octagonal in the centre. The pilasters are more tastefully carved with figure compositions. The pilaster to the right of the recess in the verandah had a lotus topped by several tiers of corbels surmounted by capital fashioned in the form of mythological creatures having the body of a bovine and the head of a man or a woman. The access to the hall from the verandah is through two doors which are flanked by figures of *dvarapalas*. The top of the walls of the verandah has a projected member which has a running frieze of *stupas* alternating with figures.

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The main artistic composition which has aroused much attention among art historians is found on the left wall on either side of a cell opening. The depiction on the right side has been identified as the representation of the sun-god trampling over a demon. The central figure is depicted seated on a four horse driven chariot and attended by female attendants. Of the two attendants, one holds a *chauri* and the other an umbrella. The figural composition on the opposite side of the opening shows a majestic figure riding on an elephant and holding an elephant god. He is accompanied by his attendant who holds a spear and a banner. The inherent strength of the animal is conveyed by his holding a tree along with its root suggesting that it has been uprooted.

3. Kondane

The *chaitya* hall at Kondane (district Kolaba) marks a progression from the complete wooden façade of the cave at Bhaja. The upright beams on either side of the archway façade were partly carved in rock. The curvature of the archway of this *chaitya* is more refined than hitherto recorded. The interior of the cave has not survived in its totality, but in its dimension, it is larger than the one at Bhaja.

The *chaitya* halls at Bhaja and Kondane preserve in their existing structures the scheme of architecture not only in the sphere of rock cut examples but also of the earlier wood work.

4. Pitalkhora

Pitalkhora (district Aurangabad) has a number of caves which were excavated in the horizontal layers of soft rock interspersed with the Deccan Trap. The soft nature of the main stone matrix has resulted in the crumbling of the caves. The façades of most of the caves are no more extant. The main attractions of this establishment are Caves 3 and 4.

Fig. 3.14 *General view of Pitalkhora Caves*

Chaitya griha

The Cave 3 is the *chaitya griha* and has the usual combination of a central nave, two lateral aisles and the apse. The system of columns continues around the stupa in the apse. The ceiling shows two different schemes. The ceiling of the central nave and apsidal end is vaulted but that of the aisles is half arched. The ceiling of the aisles have rock cut beams while its counterpart over the nave and the apse originally had wooden beams and rafters but are no more extant. The sockets cut in the rock surface for receiving the wooden members still exist today. From the extant remains of the *stupa* in the apse it is known that the entire composition was not rock cut. The extant cylindrical drum was hewn out of the living rock while the dome on top was a structural one. The drum of the stupa revealed a number of sockets of which three yielded crystal reliquaries.

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Unfortunately, the façade of the *chaitya griha* is no more extant and it possibly had a masonry or wooden screen. The entrance to this prayer hall was through a lower forecourt from where series of steps led up to the façade. The flanking walls of the stairways were covered with figure compositions.

Vihara

Cave 4 is the representative example of a monastic hall and is the grandest at Pitalkhora. Of great interest is the treatment of the basement of the *vihara*. The lofty basement is conceived as a row of elephants bearing the great weight on their backs. The top of the basement is reached by a covered flight of steps rising, as in Cave 3, from a forecourt. The entrance to this covered approach is guarded by life size, well-executed guardians on either side. They guard the entrance with spear and shield.

The façade of the residential unit is no longer extant. From the debris collected from the forecourt it appears that the original façade had a number of carvings depicting numerous motifs like the *Mahabhinishkramana* or the scene of the Great Departure, figures of *yakshas, yakshis, dvara palas, chamaradharis, kinnars,* musicians, amorous figures, animals, flowers, creepers, architectural motifs like *stupas,* facades of *chaitya grihas*, etc.

The interior of the monastery is a large pillared hall. The three rows of pillars and pilasters supported the rock beam of the ceiling. While the pillars are no more extant, the existing pilasters give us an idea of their composition. They are octagonal in the centre and square in shape below and above. The hall had seven cells along the back wall and some along the right wall. The latter is in a bad shape of preservation. Each of the existing cells has a narrow opening and a mock window having a chequered pattern.

5. Ajanta

The next in chronological line is the Buddhist monastic establishment at Ajanta (district Aurangabad). The establishment commenced at the site around the second century BC and continued to exist till the ninth century AD. The site has 30 finished and unfinished caves, of which Cave numbers 9, 10, 19, 26 and 29 are prayer halls while the rest are residential units. Even in this group, the caves belonging to the early phase of Hinayana Buddhism are Cave numbers 10 and 9. The monasteries of this early phase were small and consisted of astylar closed halls with individual cells carved into each of the three side walls. The cells had rock cut beds for the use of the monks. The walls above the door opening were carved with *chaitya* window motifs, railings and stepped pyramids.

Fig. 3.15 *General View of Ajanta Caves*

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Chaitya grihas

Cave No. 10 is the earliest of the group and its excavation started in the second century BC. Here again the façade of the cave has also disappeared. The plan and composition of the prayer hall confirm to the known examples so far recorded. The hall is apsidal in plan with a vaulted roof on top. The hall is divided internally into the nave and two aisles by a colonnade of thirty nine pillars. The pillars support the entablature on top, over which rests the vaulted roof. Originally the vaulted roof had wooden beams and rafters. The half-arched ceiling of the lateral aisles have rock cut beams and rafters in imitation of the wooden ones of the central one. The *stupa* in the apse had two cylindrical drums.

The walls of the hall are embellished with paintings, the chief attraction of the Ajanta caves. Paintings have been executed in horizontal bands and display, like sculptural friezes, religious motifs like the worship of the *Bodhi* tree by royalty accompanied by a large retinue of dancers/danseurs, musicians, soldiers and ladies, narration of the stories of the Chhadanta Jataka and the Sama Jataka etc. The stylistic rendering of the drapery, ornamentation and elaborate coiffures are representative of the sculptural art of pre-Christian era. These paintings were superimposed at a later time by the paintings belonging to the period of Mahayana Buddhism.

Fig. 3.16 *Interior of Chaitya Griha at Cave no. 10*

Cave No. 9, another early *chaitya griha*, is quite noticeably rectangular in plan. However, internally the colonnade of pillars results in the creation of an apsidal space within the *stupa*, the principle object of worship, occupying the apse. The stupa comprises of a high cylindrical drum surmounted by a round dome. The dome is capped by the usual arrangement of the *vedika* enclosing the *harmika*. The latter is conceived in the form of a tiered inverted pyramid. The nave and the apse are surmounted by a vaulted ceiling while the aisles have flat ceilings. This cave is notable for having done away with the practice of having wooden beams and rafters. The façade of the cave has a large *chaitya* window motif. Below it is the central entrance flanked by windows opening into the lateral aisles. In between the *chaitya* window motif and the door below is the horizontal architrave supported by brackets. During the period of Mahayana Buddhism, figures of the Buddha were incorporated in the façade. Here also we get evidence of two phases of wall paintings.

6. Pandulena

Pandulena or Panadava's caves refer to a group of twenty four caves in the district of Nasik. The significance of the site is twofold: from the point of view of rock cut

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architecture and for having inscriptions that shed important light on the historical processes in the Deccan especially under the Satavahanas. The establishment had its beginnings in the first century BC,when the earliest caves were excavated and continued till the sixth or seventh century AD. During the later period of construction activity, not only were some new caves added, but the existing ones also underwent alteration and sculptural flourishes. From the evidence of inscriptions we come to know that the Buddhist establishment here received not only royal patronage from the Satavahanas and the Kshaharatas but also from the laity and even monks.

Chaitya griha

The earliest *chaitya griha* of this complex is Cave No. 18. The excavation of this cave was completed around the first century AD. An inscription in this cave suggests that its construction started in the first century BC. The most characteristic feature of this *chaitya griha* is the embellishment of the façade. The wall surface above the entrance is carved by a huge *chaitya* window. This opening allows natural light into the interior of the prayer hall. The wall surface around this large window is embellished with various architectural motifs commonly associated with the Buddhist religious structure. These include *chaitya* window motifs, *stupa,* pillars, railing etc. The sole entrance door to the interior of the hall is surmounted by a *chaitya* window motif complete with vaulted roof and rafters all around its periphery. The door jambs of the entrance allude to the pillars of the interior. The space between the vaulted arch and the opening is covered with shallow carvings.

The interior of the prayer hall is austere with no embellishment of the wall surfaces. Of the fifteen pillars, ten pillars have *ghata* shaped bases from which rise tapering octagonal shafts. There were wooden beams and rafters in the vaulted ceiling, but are no more extant. The *stupa* is characterized by a high cylindrical drum with a railing on top. The top of the dome has a *vedika* in the form of a double railing and a *harmika* shaped like an inverted tiered pyramid further supported by pillars.

Fig. 3.17 *Façade of the Pandulena Cave*

7. Junnar

As many as one hundred and forty caves were excavated from different hills all around the present day town of Junnar in district Poona. The establishment here consisted of *chaitya grihas, viharas* and rock cut cisterns. However, except for the *chaitya griha* in Cave no 3, the excavations at the site do not show much artistic flavor. Generally, the

NOTES

monasteries are small having a few cells and conspicuous by the complete lack of surface embellishments. Some of them are quadrangular in plan with individual cells arranged along the back of the verandah. There is evidence of use of some kind of detachable pillars constructed out of masonry or more possibly wood. Some of the caves may have had wooden facades.

8. Chaitya griha at Bedsa

The *chaitya griha* at Bedsa is approached through a narrow passage between the unhewn rock mass which covers much of the façade of the cave until one is standing in front of it. After navigating the outer rock mass one enters into the portico or the verandah. The verandah is fronted by a colonnade of pillars and pilasters, total four in number.

From bottom to top, each of them has a four tiered pedestal on which rests a large *ghata* base. Thereafter rises the octagonal shaft crowned by a bell shaped fluted lotus with an *amalaka* on top. Over the *amalaka*, framed within a square box, rests the inverted pyramid which provides a base for the kneeling addorsed with couple riders. The animals represented here are horse, elephant and bull. The pillars each have two pairs of animals with their riders, one faces outside and the other inside. The pilasters, however, have only one facing the pillars. There are cells on either end of the verandah. The plain wall surface is relieved with carvings of architectural motifs like *chaitya* arches, railings and roofs arranged in several horizontal tiers.

Fig. 3.18 *Relief on the Verandah Wall, Bedsa*

In sharp contrast to the sculptural depiction of the verandah, the interior is strictly bereft of any surface ornamentation. The pillars forming the colonnade are austere with their octagonal shafts. The interior is illuminated by light from the two door openings, a large *chaitya* window and a *jali* window. The interior has the usual combination of a vaulted roof over the central nave and half arched ceiling over the aisles. Their wooden beams survived till the modern times and were lost during the British period. The principal object of veneration, the *stupa*, has a two tiered cylindrical drum, each surmounted by a railing. The top of the *stupa* also has a double railing with an inverted pyramid. One can still see the wooden shaft that stands in the centre of the pyramid, however, the lotus umbrella is missing. Subsequently, during the period of Mahayana Buddhism the pillars were painted with figures of the Buddha.

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Fig. 3.19 *Interior of the Chaitya Griha, Bedsa*

Vihara

The monastery at Bedsa is also unique in its architectural form. The main structure is an astylar hall fronted by a verandah. A screen originally separated the verandah from the main hall, which is no more extant. The verandah has a single cell and a cistern to the right and two cells to the left. The main hall has a vaulted ceiling with nine cells opening out from it. Most of the cells have two rock cut beds suggesting double occupancy. Opening into the cells is through narrow doors having a raised door sill and slight incline inwards. They are flanked by double pilasters. Between two cells are mock windows. The door is crowned by a *chaitya* arch and the wall surface in between is relieved with railing motifs one at the bottom and the other at the top.

Early Buddhist Art of Andhra Region

Evidence of sculptural art on Buddhist *stupas* is readily available in the region of Andhra Pradesh. Stylistically, they show similarity with the evidence reported from Sunga period sites of north and central India. Therefore, stylistically the sculptured panels from the Andhra region may also be placed within the time bracket of second and first centuries BC.

Jaggayyapeta

A sculptural panel from Jaggayyyapeta, site of a Buddhist *stupa*, depicts a universal monarch or *chakravartin* ruler. The white marble slab shows a male figure standing in the centre and towering all other depictions. The centrality and hierarchical scaling with respect to the surrounding figures suggest his identification as the *chakravartin* ruler, the main subject of the entire portrayal. The king is depicted standing, facing front, his right hand is raised up pointing towards the sky and the left is placed near his chest. His upper body is bare except for series of jewellery. A diaphanous *dhoti* seems to be tied at the waist. All around him are depictions of miniature figures of a horse and an elephant near his feet. A demure female figure is depicted standing below the raised right hand of the king. Two male figures are depicted standing to the left of the universal monarch. On either of the king's head is the depiction of the wheel on a standard to the right and a rectangular gem also on a standard to the left. An umbrella is seen canopying the head of the monarch. Vertical lines of square objects appear to be falling from above.

The diverse elements in this panel tell the story recounted in the Mandhata Jataka. The Jataka tells the story of a universal monarch, Mandhata, after whom the Jataka is also named. In the story the king is invested with 'seven Precious Possessions' and

NOTES

'Four Supernatural Powers'. He also had the power to cause a shower of precious gems by simply clenching his left palm and then touching it with his right hand. While it appears from the narrative that the said Jataka may be extolling the virtues and power of a universal monarch but in truth it highlights the effects of greed and acts as a warning against it. The seven precious possessions of the story are represented by the queen to the right, minister and general to his left, horse and elephant near his feet, *dharma* represented by the wheel on top and wealth by the square gem on the left flank of his head. The attitude of the king with his right hand raised and left hand held near his chest shows him commanding the shower of precious gems. The string of square objects falling from the sky may represent the falling gems.

Stylistically, the diverse depictions on the slab are more in the nature of carving rather than of relief sculptures. The deeply carved lines on the panel, if anything, are only suggestive of the softness of marble as the background stone matrix rather than any artistic style. Elongated body of the central figure with emphasis on linear and angularity of the limbs is reminiscent of relief sculptures of Bharhut. However, even the most flat figures at Bharhut had softer body contouring than the present example. The elaborate coiffure is characteristic of the period. Since the treatment of each of the figures is flat the softness of the flesh is completely missing. The round breasts and the swelling hips of the queen depicted to his right are much better in comparison.

From the point of view of composition, the random arrangement of the different elements of the story shows no regard for spatial context, hierarchical scaling, depth and perspective. The elephant and the horse appear more like toys than real depictions of real animals. On the whole this particular specimen appears quite archaic even in comparison to examples from Bharhut and Sanchi Stupa I.

Fig. 3.20 *Mandhata Jataka Relief*

3.7 SUMMING UP

- During the lifetime of the Buddha, he and his disciples wandered from place to place to propagate his message among the people and increase the popularity of the newly formed Buddhist monastic order among the masses.
- Places associated with the important events of his life became places of pilgrimages and Buddha was deified.

Check Your Progress

7. When did rock-cut architecture first begin?
8. What is the significance of the Pandulena caves?

NOTES

- The monks residing in monasteries carried out regular discourses on the Buddha's teachings and retold the Buddha's life story along with the stories of his previous life to impress upon the laity the significance of this new religion.
- The close involvement of the trading community and the contemporary political class hastened this process of up gradation and structures of more permanent material and visual appeal began to come up.
- The single most important object of veneration among the Buddhists monks and laity was the *stupa.* While originally they were basically funerary structures, with the development of Buddhism, it became the symbol of the Buddha himself and gained sanctity as a sacred object of reverence.
- The *stupa* became the focal point of early Buddhist artistic endeavour not only as an architectural form but also as an object that deserved sculptural art for its decoration.
- The prayer halls were known as *chaitya* and it housed a stone-cut *stupa* as the main object of veneration. The residential suites comprising of small cells were known as the *vihara*.
- Early Buddhist sculptural art is found on the railing pillars and *toranas* as at Bharhut and exclusively on *toranas* as evidenced on the Great Stupa at Sanchi.
- The most important aspect of the early Buddhist art is the spirit of 'aniconism'. The term 'aniconism' refers to the practice of depiction of a divinity in symbolic form and not in human or anthropomorphic form.
- The begining of Budddhist Architecture in a particular direction started with Mauryan emperor Ashoka. After seeing death and devastation in Kalinga war in 255 BC he converted himself as a follower of Buddhism. As Ashoka was the follower of Thera cult of Buddhism, it strictly prohibits the construction of any figure or figure images of Buddha.
- Earliest Phase of Buddhist Art is defined as Aniconic which means representation of Buddha's life through symbols such as an elephant, symbol of his birth; A Bodhi tree which is the symbol of enlightenment; and the wheel, as a representation Dharmachakrapravartana(his first sermon).
- The site of the ancient *stupa* is located in district Satna, Madhya Pradesh. The archaeological ruins at the site were discovered by Sir Alexander Cunningham in 1873.
- The art of Bharhut presents a representative picture of the Sunga period art prevalent in the region.
- The sculptural representations found on the railing and the *torana* comprise of numerous images of *Yaksa* and *Yaksi*, *Salabhanjikas,* Naga figures, mortal human beings depicted in different attitudes, Jataka stories, dwarves, etc.
- The Sunga art tradition as witnessed at Bharhut has very low relief i.e., the figures appear to be pasted on to the stone surface, there is not much depth from the surface of the sculpted figure to the surface of the surrounding stone mass.
- An important decorative motif in the Early Buddhist art is the *Salabhanjika*. This motif represents a beautiful damsel in close association with a tree, more specifically the *sal* tree. The motif is the artistic representation of the indigenous pagan belief that beautiful women can make a *sal* tree blossom by the mere touch of her feet.

NOTES

- The story of the rise and growth of Sanchi as a sacred pilgrimage site is almost analogous to the growth of Buddhism underAshoka. It is said that Ashoka constructed a modest stupa at the hilltop of Sanchi and also erected a pillar there to commemorate his association with this region.
- The site continued to survive actively till the 13th century AD. The Buddhist establishment as it survives today in Sanchi comprises of three stupas, monasteries, Mauryan pillar, Buddhist shrines datable to the Gupta period and a number of free standing votive images of the Buddha and others of the Buddhist pantheon.
- The Stupa I at Sanchi is one of the biggest and grandest of all existing Buddhist structures in the country. The structure of the present stupa hides within it the remains of the earliest stupa at the site which was constructed by Emperor Ashoka.
- During the beginning of the Satavahana period the entire composition was further embellished with the erection of the *toranas*, one in each cardinal direction. The combination of the ground railing and the *toranas* are study in contrast in respect of their surface embellishment.
- Another early structural component of the Buddhist establishment at the site is Stupa II. From the evidence of inscriptions found on reliquaries in the stupa they contained bone fragments of some famous Buddhist monks who preached during the Mauryan period and had also participated in the Third Buddhist Council at Pataliputra convened by Emperor Ashoka himself.
- The significance of the evidence that we gather from Stupa II is the fact that the inspiration for such large scale stone carving that had its beginning in the Sunga period came from wood and ivory carving that enjoyed wide popularity in the earlier period.
- The sculptural depictions on the *toranas* of the Great Stupa are a virtual panorama of Buddhist symbols, mythological motifs, semi-divinities, animal figures, floral motifs, the narrative panels etc.
- Among the auspicious motifs depicted on the architraves, mention may be made of the sacred *Triratna* symbol and the three damsels.
- The depiction of the Mahakapi Jataka at Sanchi is on the rectangular surface of the *torana* pillar. The entire scene has been captured within a frame of floral and architectural motifs.
- The architraves of the Sanchi *toranas* depict various events connected with the life of the Buddha as well as the events that occurred after his death like Prince Siddharth's renunciation of his palace life, enlightenment at Bodhgaya, conversion of the fire worshiping Kasyapas, departure of King Bimbisara from Rajgriha, War of Relics after the Buddha's death, scenes of Paradise etc.
- The master craftsman at Sanchi utilized a number of narrative devices to help provide a continuous rendition of the story from the beginning to the end. In this pursuit, the elongated rectangular architraves provided the perfect backdrop.
- The inception of the storyline is from one end where from the backdrop of the gates of the city of Kapilavastu, surrounded by a moat and buildings within, is the depiction of a horse leaving with an umbrella on top.
- The excavation process after the selection of suitable rock mass began with the tracing of the outline of the façade of the structure. Thereafter, the actual chiseling of the rock surface started at the level of the ceiling and this was carried deep into the rock mass to the desired depth.

NOTES

- The *chaitya griha* at Kondivite is dated to the 100 BC. On plan the prayer hall has a long rectangular assembly hall which leads to the small circular area housing the stupa through a narrow vestibule.
- The *chaitya* hall at Bhaja is a large hall with a vaulted roof and an apsidal end. The hall was divided longitudinally by two colonnades into a broad central nave and two lateral aisles. The apsidal end of the hall accommodated a solid rock cut stupa.
- The rock cut stupa in the apse of the *chaitya* is a hemispherical dome placed over a cylindrical drum. The dome is surmounted by double railing, one on top of the other. This stone *harmika* originally enclosed a wooden umbrella now no more extant.
- The *chaitya* hall at Kondane (district Kolaba) marks a progression from the complete wooden façade of the cave at Bhaja.
- The *chaitya* halls at Bhaja and Kondane preserve in their existing structures the scheme of architecture not only in the sphere of rock cut examples but also of the earlier wood work.
- Pitalkhora (district Aurangabad) has a number of caves which were excavated in the horizontal layers of soft rock interspersed with the Deccan Trap.
- The Cave 3 is the *chaitya griha* and has the usual combination of a central nave, two lateral aisles and the apse.
- Cave 4 is the representative example of a monastic hall and is the grandest at Pitalkhora. Of great interest is the treatment of the basement of the *vihara*.
- Pandulena or Panadava's caves refer to a group of twenty four caves in the district of Nasik. The significance of the site is twofold: from the point of view of rock cut architecture and for having inscriptions that shed important light on the historical processes in the Deccan especially under the Satavahanas.
- The *chaitya griha* at Bedsa is approached through a narrow passage between the unhewn rock mass which covers much of the façade of the cave until one is standing in front of it. After navigating the outer rock mass one entersinto the portico or the verandah.
- The monastery at Bedsa is also unique in its architectural form. The main structure is an astylar hall fronted by a verandah. A screen originally separated the verandah from the main hall, which is no more extant.
- The Buddhist establishment in Amravati was located near Daharanikota, ancient Dhanyakataka, was the capital of the later Satavahanas.
- According to the testimony of the inscriptions at Amravati , the sculpted casing slabs of the *stupa* were added when the renowned Buddhist monk, Nagarjuna, resided in the Andhra region.

3.8 KEY TERMS

- **Aniconic:** Symbols used to suggest the presence of a divinity.
- **Apsidal:** An architectural form which on plane appears as a rectangle closed at one end by a semi-circle, in other words having a 'U' shaped plan.

NOTES

- **Bodhisattva:** Member of the Buddhist pantheon who are Buddha to be. They have the requisite spiritual accomplishments which make them eligible to attain salvation.
- **Chaitya:** A Buddhist shrine where the main object of veneration is the stupa, symbolic of the Buddha or the Buddha himself.
- **Dharmachakra:** Buddhist 'Wheel of Law'. In Hinayana Buddhism, the Dharmachakra is also used to symbolically represent Sakyamuni Buddha.
- **Mahabhinishkramana:** The event of the Great Departure of Prince Siddhartha from his palace at Kapilavastu is celebrated in Buddhism as Mahabhinishkramana and is regarded as one of the important events of his life.
- **Mahayana Buddhism:** A branch of Buddhism that came into prominence after the beginning of the Christian era that advocates the transference of merit, prajanaparamita.
- **Salabhanjika:** A decorative motif depicting a beautiful damsel in close association with a tree.
- **Stupa:** Originally it was a tumulus of earth gathered at the site of the cremation of a saint or a great king.
- **Vedika:** A railing enclosure of a sacred place.
- **Viharas:** A Buddhist monastic establishment.
- **Vidyadharas:** Celestial beings depicted flying over the head of divinities often bearing garlands.
- **Yaksa:** A folk deity, nature spirits and guardian of wealth and treasure. yakshi; female counterpart of Yaksas; closely associated with fertility.

3.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. While originally stupas were funerary structures, with the development of Buddhism, they became the symbols of the Buddha himself and gained sanctity as objects of reverence.
2. Jataka stories were the stories of the previous birth of the Buddha.
3. Aniconic means representation of Buddha's life through symbols such as, an elephant being the symbol of his birth, a Bodhi tree being the symbol of his enlightenment, and a wheel being his symbol of *Dharmachakrapravartana* or his first sermon.
4. The eight claimants were: Ajatshatru, Shakya, Buli, Koliya, Malla, Brahmins, Lichchavi and Kushinagar.
5. The most notable feature of Bharhut art tradition is the low relief or bas-relief of the sculptural depictions. The concept of relief refers to the degree to which the figures sculpted on the stone panel project out from the stone background into which they are carved.
6. The sculptural exuberance at Sanchi states emphatically the objective of the craftsman to portray life in all its myriad forms as he observes in the nature around him.

NOTES

7. The history of rock-cut architecture is about a 1000 years old and begins as early as the second century BC at Bhaja and Ajanta and culminates into the newest caves at Ellora.
8. Pandulena caves refer to a group of 24 caves in the district of Nasik. The significance of this site is two-fold: from the point of view of rock-cut architecture and for having inscriptions that shed important light on the historical processes in the Deccan, especially under the Satvahanas.

3.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Mention briefly the main elements of early Buddhist art and how did it develop?
2. What were the main features of Buddhist art found in Bharhut?
3. Briefly describe the architecture of Buddhist rock cut caves of western India and their construction techniques.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the architectural features of a fully developed Buddhist stupa.
2. Write an essay on the sculptural characteristics of the Great Stupa at Sanchi.
3. Write an essay on the examples of early Buddhist art of Andhra region.

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UNIT 4 EMERGENCE OF REGIONAL SCHOOLS

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STRUCTURE

4.0 INTRODUCTION

The study of 'ancient Indian art' is basically the study of Indian religion. Art and architecture in India have always been subservient to the cause of religious glory. This explanation is universally applicable to Brahamanical religion as well as the protestant religious movements of Buddhism and Jainism. Art was not pursued merely for the sake of art; it always aimed at the attainment of a higher metaphysical goal. Even when secular art was produced it was sought in some way to link it with the religions. Thus we have temple walls decorated with myriad events reflecting the daily concerns of a devotee's life. An image of God when viewed by a devotee was meant to invest him with spiritual energy to fight the ever present battles of life. Apart from the Buddha and the Jaina Tirthankaras who were avowedly mortal humans reaching heights of salvation, the Brahmanical deities and even deities of the latter Mahayana Buddhist pantheon were viewed as belonging to a separate realm having control over the mortal humans. When these divinities were composed in three-dimensional form the sculptors got their inspiration from the human form, but invested it with multitudes of heads and hands to suggest their omnipresence and supernatural power.

As the pantheons gradually increased in the different religious systems, so also an attempt to distinguish them arose in the form of assigning distinctive iconographic trait to each individual deity. Therefore, we observe that as we progress through the different regional centers of art flourishing in different parts of the country, art and iconography gradually merged into one another.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the main characteristics and styles of the different regional schools of art in India
- Trace the evolution of sculptural and architectural style over time

- Identify the influences of contemporary western art styles
- Recognize the contribution of Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina religious ideology in Indian sculpture

NOTES

4.2 GANDHAR SCHOOL OF ART

Since the Macedonian conquest of the north-western regions of the Indian sub-continent by Alexander the Great, the region, comprising portions of modern Afghanistan and Pakistan, functioned as cultural and mercantile highways. The region became a virtual melting pot of diverse political and cultural features. After the fall of the Mauryan Empire, the north-western region was ruled by a number of Indo-Greek rulers. Some of the important Indo-Greek rulers known from literary and numismatic evidences are Diodotus, Euthydemos, Demetrious, Eucratides, Menander, Heliocles, Antalcidas, Amyntas and Hermaeus. Political upheaval in Central Asia led to several hoards of nomadic tribes descending into India. The first such wave brought in the Sakas. The Sakas were able to extend their political sway from the north-west into the heartland of India around Mathura and its neighbouring regions. The earliest Saka ruler was Maues. The other Saka rulers of north-west were Azes I, Azilises and Azes II. Around the last quarter of the pre- Christian era, during the time of Azes II, the region came under the suzerainty of the Parthians. The important rulers of this line were Vonones and Gondophernes. It was after the destruction of the Parthians that the Kushanas built their Empire.

Ancient Geo-political Units

The geo-political units that were the mainstay of the Saka-Parthian rule in the north-west are generally clubbed under the name Gandhara. However, this is a wrong nomenclature, for the term Gandhara can be applied to a small geographical area corresponding to modern Taxila in Pakistan only. The more proper terminology will be Bactro-Gandhara region corresponding to the regions of Bactria (modern Balkh in Afghanistan) with its capital of the same name, Kapisa (modern Begram in Afghanistan) with the similarly named capital and Gandhara. Another important region within this gamut was the Swat valley (Pakistan) analogous with the ancient kingdom of Uddiyan.

Cultural Impact

This small geo-political region having been the playing field of numerous west Asian, central Asian and south Asian population groups, left its indelible mark in the form of the art tradition of the region which cumulatively gave rise to the famed 'Gandhara Art'. Gandhara Art as we know it today is an amalgamation of a number of diverse traits drawn from Hellenistic, Indian, west Asiatic (Iranian) and Central Asian tribal elements. For their ideological inspiration they drew from Buddhism, Brahmanical, and Greek/ Roman pantheons.

Region of Kapisa

Excavations at the site of Begram, the ancient capital city of Kapisa, yielded a hoard of art objects having diverse affiliations—Hellenistic, Chinese, West Asian, Roman, Alexandrian and, of course, Indian. The hoard, predominantly secular luxury goods, was found from the room of a ruined building. The hoard comprised of plaster casts

of metal works datable to late Hellenistic period, Syrian glass, Roman and Alexandrian sculptures, lacquer ware from China and ivory objects of Indian origin. The building from where the hoard was recovered was destroyed during a raid of Shahpur I, a Sassanid. The date of the event is placed around 241 AD thus also providing a termination date for the objects of the hoard.

The extant broken pieces of ivories were originally part of a larger narrative panel apparently of Buddhist association. The different extant pieces show architectural features such as the *torana*, similar to the one known from the Great *Stupa* at Sanchi. Two women lavishly ornamented are depicted standing side-by-side within the *torana* pillars. The extant portion of another broken ivory piece depicts a lady dressed in Indian drapery standing on a crocodile. The depiction is possibly a representation of the river goddess Ganga standing on her *vahana*, the *makara*.

Yet another notable antiquity from the Kapisa region is the gold reliquary found from Bimaran, Afghanistan. The reliquary was discovered by Charles Masson. This reliquary was found in association with four copper coins of Azes II in mint condition and an inscribed steatite casket within which the reliquary was placed. The ruby studded reliquary depicts two sets of three standing figures. The central figure is of the Buddha flanked by the bearded Brahma in the outfit of an ascetic and Indra in princely garb. The Buddha is draped in a monastic robe covering both his shoulders. The right hand of the Buddha displays the *abhaya mudra*. Apart from these six figures, in two groups, the reliquary also depicts two other individual figures–a man appearing to walk forward and displaying the *anjali mudra*. All the figures are depicted within pillared arched niches.

Fig 4.1 Bimaran Reliquary

Region of Gandhara

The largest and the most famous city of the Gandhara region was undoubtedly Taxila, as the Greeks knew it, or Takshashila, the Sanskritised name. This famous city was identified with the ruins of Sirkap. The first settlement at the site was established by the Bactrian Greeks in the second century BC. Among the notable structures of the city was an apsidal temple of Buddhist affiliation. On plan, the horseshoe shaped structure had a

NOTES

stupa and a rectangular assembly area. An interesting point in the composition of these two areas was that the *stupa* was not an integral part of the assembly area as we find at the cave sites of Bhaja, Karle, Ajanta, etc. Here the *stupa* was distinct and screened from the general assembly hall. The excavations at the site yielded a number of stucco heads, which had distinct Indian and Hellenistic styles and forms.

Another structure found during the excavations at Sirkap was a basement of a *stupa* that no longer exists. This structure is important in that it shows an amalgamation of Indian and Hellenistic architectural motifs as surface decoration. The wall surface is decorated with repetitions in relief of pillars and pilasters having acanthus leaf capital. This feature is reminiscent of Hellenistic architectural forms. The Indian style makes its appearance in the form of *torana* gateways, ogee-arched doorway and the pediment façade. Here again the imprint of Hellenistic motif is seen in the depiction of double- headed eagles on the ogee-arches and the single-headed eagles on the *toranas*.The Eagle is associated with death in Hellenistic mythology.

Among the art objects recovered from the site mention may be made of 'toilet tray'. These are basically round dishes having religious application rather than as a cosmetic object. One such dish depicts a lady dressed in Parthian fashion reclining and drinking wine. Another figure is depicted seated by her bedside also partaking wine while an attendant holding a wreath over the reclining lady is depicted standing at the back.

Region of Swat Valley

Archaeological investigations in the Swat valley have revealed that the region played an important role in the development of Buddhist ideology in this region but also in the flourishing of Buddhist art. A large body of art objects recovered from the region clearly demonstrates that they professed certain stylistic features which appear closer to the Parthian art of Iran than the Hellenistic art traditions commonly found in the Bactro- Gandhara region. A clear example of the Parthian influence in the Swat valley comes from a stone sculpture of the seated Buddha. The sculpture carved in grey stone depicts the Buddha seated on a floral pedestal flanked to his right and left by Brahma and Indra respectively. The right hand of the Buddha displays the *abhaya mudra* while the standing figures have their hands folded in adoration. Many such images betraying the Parthian influence have been reported from different sites of the Swat Valley.

The Kushanas

The mighty and famous Kushana emperors who ruled over large parts of north India were originally a nomadic tribe of Central Asia. According to several Chinese historical texts they were members of the Yueh-chi tribe. Their original homeland was in the region of Chinese Turkestan from where they were defeated and forced to flee by a neighbouring tribe around 165 BC. During their wandering through the Taklamakan desert, there was a division in the tribe. The majority of the people continued westwards in search of a new homeland. However, a small portion of the original tribe went southwards to settle along the Tibetan plateau. This group came to be known in history as the Little Yueh-chi.

The original group, known as the Greater Yueh-chi, defeated the Sakas and settled in their country. However, they were forced from this land also and they moved further west and south into the valley of the Oxus or the Amu Darya. Here they settled

NOTES

in the region of Bactria. Gradually, the Yueh-chi left their nomadic ways and settled permanently in their new homeland. They were now divided into five principalities, one of which was Kuei-shuang or Kushana. The history of the later Han dynasty records that around the first quarter of the second century AD, K'ieou-tsieou-k'io, chief of the Kuei-shuang, attacked and defeated the chieftains of the other four principalities and declared himself king. This king died at the ripe age of 80 and was succeeded by his son Yen-Kao-tchen. He conquered T'ien-tchou, i.e., the heartland of India, possibly the Punjab plains and appointed a governor.

This was the beginning of the political supremacy of the former Yueh-chi tribe and it came to be known by its new name–the Kushanas. However, the Han tradition still retained the old name and they called this new dynasty as Ta-Yueh-Chi.

K'ieou-tsieou-k'io, chief of the Kuei-shuang, is identified with Kujula who bore the title of Kadphises I. He was succeeded by his son Yen (Wema) Kao-tchen (Kadphises). According to the evidence of Chinese texts we come to know that Kadphises II was the first Kushana king to extend his rule into mainland India.

The conquest of Punjab by Kadphises II paved the way for Kanishka, the most dynamic ruler of the Kushana dynasty, to extend his political suzerainty over large parts of mainland India. His Empire, at its zenith, extended from Bihar in the east to Khorasan in the west and from Khotan in the north to Konkan in the south. From the evidence of *Si-Yu-Ki* and *Rajtarangini* we come to know that Kashmir also formed part of the dominions under Kanishka. A tradition recorded by Al Beruni states that his rule extended over Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia.

The date of Kanishka is placed around the close of the first century AD and is generally accepted by historians and scholars that the Saka Era beginning in 78 AD actually refers to the beginning of Kanishka's reign. Kanishka was a great patron of Buddhism, but it does not appear that he was a practicing Buddhism. His benevolent religious policy is suggested by his coins which have on their reverse a large gamut of divinities belonging to many pantheons like Greek, Sumerian, Elamite, Persian and Indian– both Buddhist and Brahmanical.

Kanishka was succeeded by Vasishka who reigned for short time. He was succeeded by Huvishka, another shining light in the Kushana dynasty. Huvishka ruled for a long time. In fact, he ruled jointly with Vasishka II and his son Kanishka II. Buddha is conspicuous by his absence on the coins of Huvishka. The next king was Vasudeva and as his name suggests he appears to have naturalized in the new homeland. Kushana power declined after the reign of Vasudeva and while there continued to be rulers of this dynasty like Kanishka III and Vasudeva II, it was the Saka satraps who functioned as independent rulers in different parts of the vast Kushana Empire.

Architecture in the Bactro-Gandhara Region

Buddhism entered into the north-west region of the sub-continent under the missionary zeal of the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka. By the time of the ascendancy of the Kushana Empire, the region had become a fertile ground for the proliferation of Buddhist art and architecture. Interestingly, while the extant evidence of the region highlights the sculptural tradition, especially, in the service of Buddhism, not much remains to explain the architectural features of the time in the region. Of the still standing structures of the period, mention may be made of the ruined *stupa* and *vihara* at Guldara, Afghanistan. The structure may be dated to the second century AD. The structure consists of a high square base with a *stupa* on top. The entrance to the structure was

NOTES

through the east as attested by the presence of a stairway on that side. The wall surface of the base is decorated with niches framed by pilasters and topped by arches. The presence of sockets in the niches suggests that originally there were wooden brackets which supported stucco sculptures. However, nothing remains of this arrangement today. The extant portion of the *stupa* above the base also has similar surface decoration comprising of pilasters and arches. The surface decoration of the structure represents a happy amalgamation of Indian and Hellenistic motifs. Architecturally, the masonry technique is inspired from the Parthian diaper-masonry technique. This entails the horizontal placement of rock slabs with the decorative elements of pilasters and arches coming out ever so slightly from the main body. While the facing of the structure has been done by the use of symmetrically sized blocks, the interior of the walls has filling of large irregular stone blocks to provide adequate strength to the entire structure.

Another site having ruins of Buddhist monastic establishment of the Kushana period is Takht-i-Bahi in Pakistan. The excavations at the site revealed massive complex comprising of open courtyards surrounded by cells, *stupas* and dwelling units. There were three main courtyards; a *vihara* court, opposite to it was another courtyard which led to the *stupa* court via a flight of steps. The *stupa* court and the intermediary courts were surrounded by sculptural niches which are now vacant. The *stupa* in the *stupa* court is today survived only by its basal portion.

Sculptural Art in the Bactro-Gandhara Region

As mentioned earlier, the famous Gandhara School of Art had its beginning in the pre- Christian Era and continued to blossom till fifth century AD. However, the zenith of this school corresponded with the rule of the Kushanas who undoubtedly gave patronage to art practices in the region. A dominant feature of what we today recognize as the Gandhara trait is the presence of Hellenistic art styles devoted to the cause of the propagation of Buddhist faith. Therefore, while the subject of the sculptures was of Indian origin, their treatment and execution were of Greeco-Roman style. This unique amalgamation led to the creation of images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas with Indian attributes and iconographic specialties, but having the physique of a Roman god. This led to the presence of moustache, turban, jewellery and dressing style typical of Hellenistic art tradition.

Predominantly Gandhara art objects were fashioned out of stone, particularly grey schist, stucco, terracotta and very few of metal. Chronologically, stone and stucco were widely used during the second century AD. The main centre during this period appears to be Taxila and its adjoining areas in the region of Gandhara. Subsequently, in the third, fourth and fifth centuries AD stone gradually receded to the background and more and more images were fashioned out of stucco and terracotta. The main centres of this later phase appear to be Jaulian, Taxila and Hadda near Jalalabad, Pakistan.

Of the very few metal objects of the Kushana period, mention may be made of the 'Kanishka reliquary' found from the *stupa* of Kanishka at Shah-ji-ki-Dheri. The modern site corresponds to ancient Kanishkapura, capital city established by Kanishka, near modern Peshawar, Pakistan. The original *stupa*, at the time of its construction was perhaps one of the largest *stupa*s and a specimen of Kushana architectural feat. The reliquary, found from a chamber inside the *stupa*, has on its lid Buddha seated on a lotus flower. He is flanked to his right and left by standing figures of Brahma and Indra respectively. The right hand of the Buddha displays the *abhaya mudra*. Brahma dressed as an ascetic and Indra in the royal drapery stand with hands in *anjali mudra*. The treatment

NOTES

of the drapery on all the three is characteristic of the region, the heavy drapery suggested by deep lines and ridges. The side of the lid has a round procession of geese reminiscent of some Mauryan pillar capitals. The body of the casket depicts figures of three seated Buddhas, standing Brahma and Indra, Kushana royalty, perhaps Kanishka himself and the celestial divinities, Miiro, the sun-god and Mao, the moon-god.

Of the stone images, the standing figure of the Buddha was a favourite of the sculptors. Whether seated or standing, the images of Buddha invariably show him wearing a Roman Toga i.e., a shawl covering the upper body and a lower garment tied at the waist. The treatment of the garment is in the form of characteristic deep ridges. In majority of the cases, both the shoulders of the Buddha are covered with a shawl. In most cases the *urna* on the forehead and the *usnisa* on the head are prominently shown. Another unique characteristic of the Gandhara style is the depiction of the hair in wavy lines. However, this is not to say that curls were not depicted, but the former was more prevalent. The halo surrounding the head of the Buddha was invariably plain, devoid of any ornamentation. Regarding the facial features and the composition of the physical body, the extant images are heavily indebted to classical Hellenistic ideals. Since the images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva were based of Greek and Roman gods they have well sculpted physique with great attention on the beauty of the human body. The youthful face is characterised by sharp knife-edged brow ridge, pointed nose, sometimes with moustache and elongated ears. The torso and the arms were not covered with a shawl, and suggest musculature and taut abdomen muscles. The standing figures of the Buddha generally display the *abhaya mudra* or the *varada mudra* with their right hands. When the Buddha is depicted seated in *padmasana*, his hands are in *dhyana mudra*, i.e., deep in meditation, or in *dharmachakrapravartana mudra* or the preaching pose.

Fig 4.2 *Buddha in Abhaya Mudra Buddhan Dhyan Mudra*

Bodhisattvas were another popular subject in the Gandhara School. In Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas are defined as beings that have the required qualities of attaining Buddhahood but have not yet attained it. Since they have not yet become the Buddha,

NOTES

their sculptural depiction is in the form of royalty and not wandering mendicants. They are draped in a *dhoti* and a shawl falling across the torso. In tune with their depiction as royal personages they have elaborate coiffure, ornaments, sandals and moustaches. Their spiritual position is suggested by the presence of the *usnisa* on the head and the *urna* on the forehead. Here again the propensity for delineating the physical beauty of the human form comes to the fore. Some of the popular Boddhisattvas depicted in Gandhara art are Maitreyi, the future Buddha, who holds a vase and Padmapani Avalokiteswara, who holds a lotus flower.

Fig. 4.3 *Padmapani Avalokitesware*

An important contribution of the Gandhara art is the representation of the life-events of the Buddha's life in narrative panels. Thus we get a whole range of panels depicting the 'Dream of Maya', 'Birth of Sidddharth', his education, marriage to Yasodhara, meditation, 'the Great Departure' from the palace of Kapilavastu, practice of asceticism, 'Enlightenment at Bodhgaya', 'Preaching of the First Sermon' at Sarnath and finally his death or Mahaparinirvana at Kusinagar. In addition to these important events, various episodes of his life during the course of his wanderings propagating his knowledge are also depicted in Gandhara art. In this connection special mention may be made of the dynamic Gandhara stone sculpture from Sikri, Pakistan which shows the Sakyamuni practicing severe penance and as a result having turned into only skin and bone. This visual masterpiece, presently displayed in the Lahore Museum, shows Siddharth seated in meditation on a pedestal. The severity of his asceticism is suggested by the almost perfect depiction of the human skeleton covered only with the skin. This powerful representation could only have come from the Gandhara School whose craftsmen had mastered the knowledge of the human body. In the narrative scenes, the importance of the specific personages was indicated by the size of their representations. For instance, the Buddha always was depicted in larger size in comparison to other figures surrounding him. However, in panels depicting the nativity scene or the Great Departure, where all the figures are of almost the same size, different compositional strategies were employed. In both the above mentioned panels the attention of the associate figures were directed towards the central figure, i.e., Maya Devi in the nativity scene and Prince Siddhartha in the latter scene.

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Fig. 4.4 *Statue from Gandhara School of Art*

Apart from the strictly Buddhist sculptures, secular scenes and individual images have also been found from the repertoire of Gandhara art. Of the secular narrative panels, mention may be made of Bacchanalian scenes with emphasis on wine consumption. Here the subject-matter and its treatment were both classical. Stucco heads of Greek and Roman deities and royal personages form another part of Gandhara art. The images made from stucco were further decorated with paint. Hair and eyes were done in black while red sufficed for lips. Begram, in the Kapisa region, was a major centre of stucco work.

The unique position of Gandhara School of Art is aptly summed by Stella Kramrisch, "Gandhara… occupies a position apart. For, it is Indian and colonial from a Hellenistic point of view, it is Hellenistic and colonial when viewed from India."

Characteristics of the Gandhara School of Art at a glance:

- Date: Second half of first century BC to fourth-fifth centuries AD
- Major Centres: Bactria, Kapisa, Swat, Gandhara
- Raw material: Grey and Blue schist, slate, stucco, terracotta, metal
- Stylistic influences: Amalgamation of Hellenistic, Parthian, Indian
- Art objects: Individual sculptures and Narrative panels
- Characteristics: Beauty of the human body, classical facial features, moustache, pointed nose, wavy hair, sandals

4.3 MATHURA SCHOOL OF ART

According to the Buddhist text *Anguttara Nikaya* during the sixth century BC, Aryavarta was divided into sixteen great states also known as the '*Solasamahajanapadas*'. Of these sixteen great states, the region of Mathura was the capital of the *mahajanapada* of Surasena. Mathura or Madhura, the capital city of the Surasena was located on the banks of the Yamuna. The ancient Greek writers referred to this kingdom as Sourasenoi and its capital as Methora. Avantiputra, a king of Surasena, is said to have been among

Check Your Progress

1. Name the largest and the most famous city of the Gandhara region.
2. Name the emperor who was instrumental in introducing Buddhism to the the north-west region of the sub-continent.
3. How are the Bodhisattvas defined in Buddhism?

NOTES

the chief disciples of the Buddha. It was through him that Buddhism reached this region and later on played an important role in the development of the Mathura School of Art.

Panini, a renowned grammarian of about the second century BC, refers to Andhakas and Vrishnis of Mathura in his book *Astadhyayi*. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, datable to the Mauryan period, mentions that the Vrishnis were a *sangha* i.e., they had a republican form of government. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of the Mauryan Emperor Chgandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra, informs us that during his time the Surasema capital, Mathura, was a centre of worship of Krishna. The Surasena territory formed an integral part of the Mauryan Empire.

In addition to its role as a geo-political unit, Mathura also had a close relation with the development of different religious ideologies which ultimately provided the necessary influence for the development of Mathura Art. The presence of life-size images of - *Yaksha-Yakshi* point to the hold of folk-divinities among the local populace. Another indigenous cult that was quite prevalent in the region was the *Naga* cult. As mentioned earlier, as early as the second century BC Mathura was a prominent centre of Bhagawata religion centering around Vasudeva Krishna and the other Vrishni heroes, Samkarshana (Balarama), Pradyumna (son of Krishna by Rukmini), Samba (son of Krishna by Jambavati) and Aniruddha (son of Pradyumna). Mathura was a prominent centre of Jaina religion attested by the discovery of the ruins of a Jaina *stupa* at Kakkali Tila along with other objects of worship. Symbolic, worship of Buddha in the form of the Bodhi Tree and *Chakra* was also practised here.

Political History

After the demise of the Mauryan political suzerainty the region around Mathura came to be ruled by local chiefdoms. A large number of inscribed cast copper coins bearing 'Mitra' and 'Datta' ending names have been found from the town and its environs. During the period of Saka domination in the north-west, Maues, the Saka ruler, extended his control further into the Indian territory and extended eastwards up to Mathura. However, Maues appointed a provincial governor in Mathura to perpetuate the Saka rule in this territory. Inscriptional evidence from the Mathura Lion capital suggests that a Mahakshatrapa Ranjuvala and a Kshatrapa Sondasa were ruling from Mathura. This inscription is dates back to AD 10. In another Mathura inscription dated to AD 15, Sondasa is styled as Mahakshatrapa. A large number of satrap chiefs of Mathura are known from their coins found in this region. It seems that these satraps ruled over Mathura as semi-independent rulers. They were overthrown from their position by Kanishka, the third Kushana ruler, who established the second Kushana capital in Mathura. The Kushana rule over Mathura continued till around the second half of the third century AD. Thereafter, there appears to have been a political hiatus till the emergence of the Imperial Guptas around the fourth century AD. However, Mathura as an art centre continued to flourish right upto the Gupta period.

Archaeological investigations in and around the present day town of Mathura suggest that the ancient settlement was not a single site, but that there were a number of settlements as we find in the Bactro-Gandhara region. Some of the sites which gave evidence of ancient settlement of that time are Sonkh, Mat, Katra, Jamalpur, Chaubara, Bhuteswara, Palikhera, Maholi, Govindgarh, Kankali Tila, etc.

Development of Mathura School of Art

The earliest art objects recovered from Mathura are datable to the second century BC. Though the reported specimens do not form part of the Mathura School atelier,

NOTES

they no doubt shed light on the antecedence of an art movement in the region. These objects reflect the art style of Bharhut and suggest that the craftsmen of Mathura were well versed in art traditions practiced in distant parts of the realm. An idea about this early phase of art tradition in Mathura is significant in understanding the stylistic idioms of the Mathura School that developed and flourished under the Kushanas. The development and popularity of the Mathura School are attested by the presence of its sculptures in such distant places as Central Asia and Taxila on the one hand and Sanghol (Punjab), Sanchi, Sarnath and Sravasti, etc., on the other. Another proof of the popularity of the Mathura style is found in the existence of workshops in places such as Kausambi (near Allahabad), Ahichchhatra (near Bareilly), Sarnath and Mahasthangarh (in Bangladesh) which were drawing inspiration from this premiere art style.

Stylistic Quality of the Mathura School

The Buddha and Bodhisattva images carved in the Mathura style betray the indigenous stylistic idiom that developed during the centuries of the pre-Christian Era. The standing and the seated images are heavy and bulky, suggesting earth-bound and primitive strength. This feature has a direct association with the free-standing images of Yaksha carved during the Maurya and Sunga periods in different parts of north and central India. This particular trait is distinctly Indian and stands in contrast to the well sculpted human body of the Gandhara School. Similarly, in the female form sculpted at Mathura we find the reflection of the *Yakshi* figures of Bharhut with emphasis on the sensuality of the female physique. However, the Mathura School borrowed freely from the Bactro-Gandhara style of the north-west. Thus, as in the case of the Gandhara School, Mathura School was also characterized by an amalgamation of Indian and foreign stylistic idiom with more emphasis on the indigenous style.

Stylistically, sculptures of the Mathura School conform to certain features which are unmistakably found in all the major specimens. The standing and seated images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are characterized by round face, open eyes, sharp nose, thick lips suggesting a hint of a smile, heavy earth-bound physique, diaphanous drapery clinging to the body, folds of drapery suggested by fine lines, close shaved head with a prominent *usnisa* and a plain halo with scalloped periphery. The female figures are depicted in the full blossom of youth characterized by voluptuousness, round smiling face, knife-edge brow ridges, open eyes, thick lips, round breasts, narrow waist and broad hips. The physical attributes of the female figures are reminiscent of the Indian symbolism of fecundity. Another feature of the female figures is their apparent nudity and rich ornamentation.

The chief characteristic of the Mathura School of Art that at once identifies its provenance is its stone medium. The ateliers of the Mathura School utilized the spotted red sandstone from Sikri for their sculptural repertoire. Some scholars believe that the surfaces were covered with a layer of polychrome or gilt.

An important feature of the sculptures from the Mathura School, in sharp contrast to the Gandhara School, is the presence of dated donative inscriptions. The presence of these inscriptions helps us to minutely study the chronological evolution of the Mathura style through the centuries.

A representative type of the Mathura school is the life-size free standing image of a Bodhisattva. The image, presently displayed in the Sarnath site-museum, bears an inscription dated to the third year of Kanishka's rule. According to the inscription, the image of the Bodhisattva was dedicated by a Buddhist monk Bala. Though the image is

NOTES

designated as that of a Bodhisattva, the sculpture is fashioned like a Buddha devoid of all ornamentation and princely garments, the chief distinguishing feature of a Bodhisattva image. The image has all the stylistic and iconographic features enumerated above. Unfortunately, the right hand of the image is broken at the shoulder. The left hand is placed on his waist, a distinctive trait of the Mathura style. The notable feature of the image is a huge umbrella that is separately displayed in the museum. The underside of the huge umbrella is fully carved with sacred Buddhist symbols like the lotus, mythical beasts and other auspicious Buddhist symbols.

Of the seated images of the Buddha, the inscribed specimen from Katra is a representative example. The inscription at the base of the sculpture records that the image was donated by a Buddhist nun Amohasi for the welfare of all. The Buddha is depicted seated in *padmasana* on a *simhasana*. He is flanked by standing Bodhisattvas on both sides and flying *vidyadharas* on either side. The Buddha depicts the *abhaya mudra* with his right hand while the left hand is placed on the left knee. The placement of the left hand is a characteristic of seated images of the Mathura style. The image datable to the second century AD shows the movement towards iconographic complexity with the inclusion of figures of Bodhisattvas, *vidyadharas*, depiction of the Bodhi tree on the stele behind the halo and presence of lion figures on the pedestal to suggest the lion throne.

Fig. 4.5 *Seated Buddha*

Royal Portraits

Excavations at the site of Mat (on the east bank of the Yamuna), in Mathura, gave evidence of a one of its kind royal shrine of the Kushanas. The shrine was a rectangular edifice opening to the east. At the north-western corner of the structure was a sanctum-like enclosure consisting of two concentric circular walls. The excavations revealed that the centre of the circular enclosure was occupied by the stone sculpture of Vima Kadphises. This was the original position of the sculpture. The sculpture of Kanishka also found from the site, however, was not found at its original position. These portrait statues of the royal personages are the sole examples of then kind in the entire Indian sub-continent. The presence of these images suggests to us that the Kushana emperors believed in their divinity and personification of god on earth. The use of the title

'*Devaputra*' on the Kushana coins may be considered as an extension of this belief-system. The sculptures are now displayed in the State Museum, Mathura. The seated sculpture of Vima Kadphises depicts him wearing Central Asian dress comprising of short tunic and heavy felt boots. The inscription on the sculpture identifies the figure as that of '*Vemataksumasya*'. The standing sculpture of Kanishka is headless and is also dressed in Central Asian tunic and heavy felt boots. The right hand of the king rests on a mace and he holds a broad sword in his left hand. The bottom of the tunic bears an inscription in Brahmi characters of Kushana period. The inscription also identifies the sculpture as that '*devaputro Kanisko*'. The attitudes of the sculptures are rigid and though carved in the round they are meant to be viewed from the front. From the point of view of dress and posture the sculptures betray the foreign influence, but their workmanship and sculptural style are entirely Indian.

Fig. 4.6 Kanishka's Headless Image

Iconographic Development of Religious sculptures

As has been mentioned earlier, the region of Mathura was the playing ground of diverse religious ideologies and the master craftsmen devoted their art in the service of all without any discrimination. Chronological study of Mathura sculptures also sheds light on the gradually increasing iconographic complexities of the divinities involved. Iconography is the study of attributes and symbols associated with images of deities which help in their identification. The development of the iconography of Buddhist, Jaina and Brahmanical divinities is an important feature of Mathura Art.

Brahmanical Sculptures

The different types of Brahmanical sculptures are:

1. Vaishnava sculptures

The earliest representation of Brahmanical divinities centers on the cult of Vishnu which enjoyed strong local popularity. The earliest representation of Vishnu is in his four-armed form. Vishnu images in the collection of Mathura Museum depict the four- handed variety holding *gada*, *chakra* and *kamandalu*. The one right hand displays the *abhaya mudra* or the *varada mudra*. In some images, the *gada* is replaced by the *shankha*.

NOTES

Padma, a characteristic attribute of Vishnu images are not found this early in the art of Mathura.

Images of Balarama, second of the Vrishni heroes, were also sculpted at Mathura. Both two-armed and four-armed images of Balrama have been reported. He is identified by his distinctive serpent-hood canopy. The right hand displays the *abhaya mudra*. His other attributes include a wine cup in his left hand or a plough. The latter attribute attests to his origin as a pastoral deity before being incorporated in the all encompassing Vaishnava cult. Some rare sculptures in the Mathura Museum depict a lady standing between Krishna and Balarama. She is identified as Ekanansa, sister of the two.

2. Saiva sculptures

Images of Siva of the Kushana period were restricted to symbolic and anthropomorphic representations. The former took the form of *Linga* or phallus. The Mathura craftsmen mastered the unique style of combining the *Linga* and the anthropomorphic forms and gave rise to the *Mukhalingas*. The new form of *Mukhalinga* displayed the human head of Siva on the phallus. During this period *Ekamukhalinga* and *Chaturmukhalinga* were fashioned. As the name suggests, the former depicted a single human head while the latter depicted four heads on four sides. Each of the heads had a different nomenclature and had distinctive features which could be identified. The heads were *Tatpurusa* on the east, *Aghora* on the south, *Vamadeva* on the west, *Sadyojata* on the north and *Isana* on the top. The Isana which should be on the top of the *Linga* is not delineated. The syncretic form of Ardhanariswara is also a creation of the early Kushana period. As evident in the name itself, in this iconic style the right side of the figure represents Siva while the left side is his consort, Parvati. The right side has matted hair, trident, the attribute of Siva in the right hand, half of the vertical third eye on the forehead and *urdhvalinga*. The female left side is gracefully poised and decked with ornaments.

Skanda-Karttikeya, son of Siva, is also well represented in the early Kushana art of Mathura. He is the god of warfare and commander of the divine army. In sculptural art he is represented as a young man holding *shakti* in his left hand while the right hand displays the *varada mudra*. In some sculptures he is shown in the company of his *vahana* peacock or cock.

Sculptures of other Brahmanical divinities

Among the other Brahmanical deities represented in the art of Mathura mention may be made of Surya, Laksmi etc. One of the earliest images of the Sun-god depicts him seated in *utkutikasana* on a chariot drawn by two horses. He is draped in the dress of a Westerner complete with coat, turban, trousers and boots. He holds a lotus bud in his right hand and a dagger in his left hand.

Jaina Antiquities and Sculptures

The site of Kankila Tila seems to have been an important centre of Jaina ideology. The site preserves the ruins of the only known Jaina *stupa*. In addition to the *stupa*, the site also reported a number of Jaina sculptures. An example of a *sarvatobhadrika* image from the site depicts Tirthankaras standing in *kayotsarga mudra* on the four sides of a pillar. The Jainas are depicted standing on tiered platforms flanked by kneeling devotees in *anjali mudra*.

Fig 4.7 *Jaina Sculptures*

Gandhara School of Art vs Mathura School of Art

Sl. No.	Factors	Gandhara School of Art	Mathura School of Art
1.	**Origin**	Overwhelming influence of Hellenistic art style	Indigenous development with influence of Gandhara style in the later period
2.	**Style**	Stylistically it drew heavily from Greco-Roman idioms and was wholly foreign in spirit. Assimilation of West Asian, Parthian, Achaemenian and Bactrian influences	The early art style is reminiscent of Early Buddhist styles found from Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya
3.	**Inspiration**	The images of Greco-Roman divinities formed the basis of the Buddha and Bodhisattva images	The life-size images of Yaksha formed the basis of Buddha and Bodhisattva images
4.	**Raw-material**	Blue or Grey Schist, slate, stucco, terracotta, metal	Red-spotted sandstone from Sikri, and sometimes in buff sandstone
5.	**Physical attributes of the sculptures**	Emphasis on the physical beauty of the human form, taut muscles	Heavy earth-bound primitive strength of folk deities, not much detailing of the body
6.		Youthful face with sharp brow-ridge and pointed nose	Round, fleshy face with large open eyes, thick lips bearing a smiling countenance
7.		Hair represented in curly waves overflowing the *usnisa*	Close shaved head with a high *usnisa*
8.		Drapery in the form of the Roman Toga with thick folds suggested by deep lines and ridges	Diaphanous drapery that clings to the body and folds suggested by fine lines
9.		Invariably both the shoulders of the Buddha are covered with the *sanghati*	The *sanghati* is draped diagonally across the torso leaving the right shoulder and arm bare
10.			The right hand displaying the *abhaya mudra* is raised upto the level of the shoulder and in earlier images up to the ears
11.			In the standing images of the Buddha the left hand is placed on the waist akimbo and in the seated images on the left knee
12.		Buddha and Bodhisattva depicted with moustache and wearing sandals	Is there no comparison here to be made?
13.		The halo around the head of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas are conspicuous by the absence of any decorative motif	The halo invariably has scalloped edges and in afew cases are beautifully decorated with motifs
14.	**Styles of sculptural representations**	Gandhara School gave examples of both individual images as well as Narrative panels depicting events of the life of Buddha as well as Jataka stories	Narrative panels were not part of the repertoire of Mathura School
15.	**Subject-matter**	Apart from Buddhist sculptures and panels Gandhara School produced secular images of in stucco and sculptures of Roman divinities	Images of Buddhist, Brahmanical, Jaina and folk deities were carved along with secular subjects. The royal portraiture figures are a novelty of this School

NOTES

Mathura School of Art during the Gupta period

Mathura School continued to thrive during the Gupta period and imbibed the classical style in its art works. Mathura produced colossal images of the standing Buddha. One is on display at the Mathura Museum while another is the treasured jewel of the Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi. They have huge, intricately carved halos, a characteristic feature of the Gupta art tradition of Sarnath. The *sanghati* covering both the shoulders of the Master is diaphanous but has fine schematic lines suggesting folds of the drapery. The delineation of the folds across the body is reminiscent of the treatment of drapery of the Gandhara style. While the body had become slender in comparison to those of the Kushana period, the face still retains its plumpness. The head and the *usnisa* are covered with tight curls. Bow shaped arching eyebrows, half open contemplative eyes, thick lips and elongated ears. The *sanghati* itself is in two parts, the upper shawl and the lower *dhoti*. The left hand hangs down, holding the ends of the robe.

In addition to images of the Buddha sculptures of Jaina Tirthankaras a number of Brahmanical deities were also produced in Mathura during the Gupta period.

Fig. 4.8 *Sculpture from the Gupta Period*

Characteristics of the Mathura School of Art at a glance

- Mathura School of Art is generally coterminous with the Kushana rule in India
- Raw material used is spotted red sandstone from Sikri and sometimes buff coloured sandstone
- Strong indigenous flavour with the influence of the Gandhara style of the later period
- Individual sculptures of Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jaina divinities
- Examples of royal portrait sculptures, one of its kind in the subcontinent
- The human body is bulky and heavy, smile on the Buddha's face was used to suggest spirituality, diaphanous drapery

Check Your Progress

4. What is the chief characteristic of the Mathura School of Art?
5. What is the typical representative of the Mathura School of Art?
6. State any one difference between the Gandhar School and Mathura school.

4.4 SARNATH SCHOOL OF ART

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The Sarnath School was a flourishing art centre that marked the high watershed of Indian art tradition during the Gupta period. The Gupta period heralded the classical Age in the field of Indian art and architecture. The period witnessed the culmination of the earlier trends in art forms and styles that were prevalent in different art centres spread wide over time and space. There were innovations and inventions in all spheres of art and architecture. In the field of architecture, on the one hand it paved the way for the construction of structural temples while on the other hand in the field of rock-cut architecture there was a proliferation in the sculptural wealth as a medium of decoration. In the field of stone sculptures, the spirituality of the divinities came to be reflected in the compositions. The Gupta sculptures reflect the perfect balance between the physical beauty of the human form and the sublime quality of spiritual attainment. In the field of terracotta art, a new innovation was introduced in the form of hollow life-size individual images as well as large panels.

The Gupta Empire

After the decline of the Kushana Empire, there was political disintegration of the erstwhile Kushana Empire and a number of small kingdoms and principalities sprung from its ruins. This political ambiguity continued till the first quarter of the fourth century AD. The evidence gathered from the Allahabad Pillar Inscription of Samudragupta states that the dynasty originated from one Sri Gupta who bore the title of '*maharaja*'. He was succeeded by his son Ghatotkacha who is also referred to as '*maharaja*'. It was the third ruler of this dynasty i.e., Chandragupta I, who assumed the ostentatious title of '*maharajadhiraja*'. The inception of the Imperial Gupta dynasty is said to commence with the accession of Chandragupta I in 319 or 320 AD. He entered into matrimonial alliance with the Lichchhavis by marrying their princess Kumaradevi. This appears to have been a very strategic and significant alliance which consolidated the nascent Gupta rule over a large territory. At the time of Chandragupta I's death in 350 AD the Gupta Empire was strongly entrenched in north India.

Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta. According to the testimony of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription he vanquished several regional rulers in Ganga plains and subdued the tribal and forest people. He also defeated several rulers of the *Dakshinapatha* but allowed them to rule as his subordinates after pledging allegiance to the Gupta throne. He was succeeded by his son Chandragupta II. The major event in his reign was the conquest over the Sakas who were ruling over Gujarat and parts of the Malwa plateau. The issue of silver coins of Chandragupta II struck in imitation of Saka coins around 409 AD suggests that by this time the latter had been defeated. Chandragupta also secured an alliance with the Vakatakas who were ruling over Vidarbha by marrying his daughter Prabhavati into the family. By the sheer dint of his successful military conquests, Chandragupta II assumed the title of *Vikramaditya*.

Chandragupta Vikramaditya was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I who ruled in relative peace and calm, disturbed only towards the fag end of his reign. Skandagupta, son and successor of Kumaragupta has to his credit the task of successfully repulsing the fierce and incessant Huna attacks. With him ended the glorifying days of the Gupta Empire. The Hunas continued with their aggressive incursions and were successful in capturing different pockets of the territory. Ultimately, the Gupta dynasty breathed its last around the middle of the sixth century AD.

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Religious Ideology of the Gupta Rulers

The Gupta Empire was analogous with the rise of Brahmanical religion. The Gupta rulers were '*parambhagawatas*'. This was the age of the Puranas which championed the cause of Brahmanical religion. The Hindu religion that we see around us today is a legacy of the Gupta period. The 'classical' element of the Gupta period extended into the field of language and literature. Sanskrit language came to occupy a place of prominence. The Puranas which till then had been composed by bards now were rewritten in classical Sanskrit. The different sects of Brahmanical religion became crystallized during this period. The Gupta rulers, though openly Brahmanical, maintained a policy of tolerance towards Buddhism as well as Jainism.

Architecture During the Gupta Period

1. Rockcut Architecture

The rock cut tradition of the earlier period continued to thrive under the Guptas. While the majority of cave architecture was still dedicated to the Buddhist ideology, caves dedicated to Jaina Tirthankaras and Brahmanical deities were not rare. Ajanta flourished as a Buddhist establishment in this period. Of the 23 caves excavated during this period, only two were *chaitya* halls, caves 19 and 26, the rest were all *viharas*. Since the Deccan was under the rule of the Vakatakas, it would be more appropriate to state that the caves at Ajanta belong to the Gupta-Vakataka period. A number of caves were also excavated at the site of Bagh. The *chaitya* caves 19 and 26 are datable to the late 5th and early 6th centuries AD. These caves are remarkable for their sculptural wealth both along the interior and exterior wall surfaces. The figure compositions are affiliated to Mahayana Buddhism. The *viharas*, though basically residential units for the monks, also had a shrine room in the centre of the back wall of the cave. The introduction of the shrine room within a residential unit was an architectural innovation of the period.

2. Temple Architecture

Structural temples built in stone and bricks are a feature of religious architecture during the Gupta period. The nascent form of the stone temples is found from a number of sites in central India. These include the Vishnu temple at Tigawa, the Shiva temples at Bhumara and Khoh, The Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara and the Buddhist temples at the World Heritage site of Sanchi. In addition, Gupta stone temples are also known from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Though the Buddhist temple at Bodh Gaya has undergone a number of renovations, the original structure belonged to the Gupta period. The Desavatara Temple at Deogarh, Jhansi also belongs to this period. Brick temples of the Gupta period are known from Bhitargaon in Kanpur, Sirpur in Raipur and Paharpur in Bangladesh.

The earliest temples of the period were modest structures comprising of a small *garbhagriha*, i.e., the sanctum fronted by a small pillared *mandapa*. These temples did not have any *shikhara* and were flat roofed. The surface decorations in the early temples were restricted only to the door frame of the sanctum, often intricately carved. The wall surfaces were conspicuous by the absence of any ornamentation. The temples of the later Gupta period showed tendency to alleviate the structure by providing it with a plinth. Furthermore, the *sikhara* was also introduced over the sanctum proper. Both the Dasavtara and the Bhitargaon temple have *sikharas*. The Dasavatara Temple is also the earliest example of a *panchayatana* (five shrines) form of a temple. The main

temple occupies the centre of the plinth while there were four subsidiary shrines at the four corners of the plinth which were no more extant.

Gupta Style- Sarnath

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The Gupta style as mentioned earlier was a pan-India phenomenon which was not restricted to one particular art centre. The art centre at Sarnath was one such site where the Gupta art tradition was used in the service of Buddhism. The images found from the site were carved out of buff coloured sandstone sourced from Chunar. The high point of the Sarnath School was evident from around the early second half of the fifth century AD. The main characteristics of the Sarnath Buddha images pertained to 'elongated, slender, graceful bodies'. Another feature of these images is the diaphanous drapery which clings to the body in such a way that the physiognomy of the body beneath is clearly delineated.

The Site

Modern day settlement of Sarnath (ancient Migadaya, Rishipattana, Isipatana and Sarangnath) is located at a distance of 13km north east of Varanasi. The site became famous during the days of the Buddha. After, getting enlightenment at Bodh Gaya, the Buddha visited the Deer Park at Isipatana. It was in this Deer Park that he gave his first sermon to those five ascetics who were his companions before he came to Bodh Gaya and received enlightenment. The first sermon of the Buddha at the Deer Park is known as the *Dharmachakrapravartana Sutra* in Buddhist theology. The *Dharmachakrapravartana* means the 'setting in motion the Wheel of Law'. Here the Buddha propounded the 'Four Noble Truths' and the 'Eight-fold Path'. A Deer Park still exists at Sarnath. The delivery of the first sermon at Sarnath also laid the foundation of the Buddhist *sangha* (congregation). The five ascetics became the first members of the Buddhsit *sangha*. This event immortalized the site among the Buddhist from all over the world. It is considered as a pilgrimage point on the World Buddhist map.

The site continued to grow in size from its modest beginnings and by the time of Mauryan Emperor Ashoka, it had a large community of Buddhist monks and nuns. Ashoka also built the *Dharmarajika stupa* at the site along with the erection of a Mauryan pillar capped by the four addorsed lions. The capital of the pillar which is presently displayed in the Sarnath site museum was declared as the emblem of the Indian republic. Another *stupa*, the *Dhamek stupa,* atleast its core is also attributed to the Ashokan period. During the fifth century AD when the Chinese pilgrim Fa-hien visited Sarnath he saw two *stupas* and two *sangharams* (monasteries).

Art centre

The finest creation of the Sarnath sculptors was associated with Buddhism. The craftsmen produced both life-size standing and seated Buddha images in different pose. The hallmark of the Sarnath Buddha was the spiritual tranquility and weightlessness that permeates the entire composition. The zenith that the sculptors from Sarnath reached vis-a-vis the craftsmanship has never been rivaled leave alone surpassing. Mention may be made of the seated Buddha image depicted in the attitude of preaching. The image presently occupies the pride of place in the Sarnath site museum. The Buddha is depicted seated in *padmasana* on a pedestal with his hands arranged in *dharmachakrapravartana mudra*. A large intricately carved halo flanked by miniature figures of flying *vidyadharas* surrounds the head and reaches down up to the Buddha's shoulders. The figure of the

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Buddha is proportionate and slender with curls covering the head and the *usnisa*. The soft contours of the face are marked by arching eyebrows, downward cast contemplative eyes, elongated nose and slightly curved full lips. The *sanghati* covering both the shoulders of the Buddha is diaphanous, its existence only suggested by the edges of the dress material. The right hand palm has webbed fingers. Below the pedestal is depicted the Sarnath symbol, a wheel in profile flanked by deer, and miniature figures of kneeling monks in *anjali mudra*. The stele on either side of the Buddha is ornamented with *kirttimukhas* and rampant lions standing on their hind legs facing outwards.

Fig. 4.9 *Sculpture of Buddha in Sarnath*

Another style which made its appearance at Sarnath shows a large figure of the Buddha almost covering the entire stele. In this particular style the characteristic Gupta halo is absent and its place is taken by a 'U' shaped elongated stele which surrounds the complete figure of the central figure. The main figure of the Buddha is flanked by small figures of attendants standing on stalked lotuses. The top of the halo depicts flying *vidydharas*.

In addition to the above, the master craftsmen at Sarnath also carved images of the Bodhisattvas and narrative panels depicting events from the life of the Master. A broken stone plaque depicts all the important events of the Buddha's life from his conception to his *Mahaparinirvana*. The events are arranged in a chronological scheme from bottom upwards. The entire plaque is divided into three horizontal tiers with each tier depicting two events. The left side of the bottom tier depicts the scene of Queen Maya's dream. The composition shows the comparatively bigger figure of the Queen reclining on her side. She is attended by a number of female servants. An elephant is seen descending from the top of the tier. The right corner shows Queen Mayadevi standing grasping a branch of the Sal tree while the child emerges from her side and is being received by Indra. A separate depiction in the centre shows the infant Buddha standing on a pedestal in *abhaya mudra* and receiving his first bath at the hands of two *nagas*. In the middle register is depicted the scene of Prince Sidddhartha's Great Departure or *Mahabhinishkramana* and its associated events. The Prince is shown seated atop his trusted horse Kanthaka, denouncing his worldly possessions by giving up his princely attire and cutting his hair. The right corner shows the Prince seated in Meditation on a lotus seat and his head is canopied by an umbrella. The upper part of the top register is unfortunately broken off. However, from the extant

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part it is clear that the left corner depicted the Buddha seated in the *Bhumisparsha mudra* referring to his Enlightenment at Bodh Gaya. The image to the right depicts the event of the First Sermon at Sarnath suggested by the image of the seated Buddha in *Dharmachakrapravartana mudra*.

The popularity of deities of the Mahayana pantheon is suggested by the presence of a large number of different Bodhisattvas. An example of this diversity is suggested by the image of Bodhisattva Khasarpana Avalokitesvara. The deity is depicted standing on a lotus. The slender, elongated body of the deity is in conformity with the renowned Sarnath idiom. He is dressed in a diaphanous drapery. The right hand of the deity is broken at the shoulder. However, the extant right palm shows the *varada mudra*. The left hand holds a stalked lotus of which only the stalk is extant. The head of the Bodhisattva is adorned with matted hair and some locks fall down to the shoulder. In the centre of the coiffure is a miniature representation of Dhyani Buddha Amitabha from which the Bodhisattva emanated. From the iconographic point of view, this image conforms to the textual descriptions of Bodhisattva Khasarpana.

Gupta Sculptural Art in Other Areas

Central India appears to have been an important centre of art activities patronized by the Gutpa rulers, particularly Chandragupta II Vikramaditya. The epicentre of this activity was around Udaygiri and Sanchi. At the site of Udaygiri, district Vidisha, a number of caves were excavated and their wall surface carved with images of Brahmanical divinities. A solitary cave at Udaygiri has depictions of Jaina Tirthankaras. Cave no. 5 at Udaygiri, believed to have been excavated during the reign of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya, bears a dramatic, more than life-size representation on the Nrivaraha incarnation of Vishnu. The boar incarnation of Vishnu is represented with a human body and a face of a boar. The central figure is depicted standing triumphantly with his left leg placed on a *naga* with his hands folded in *anjali mudra*, suggesting submission. Prithvi, the earth goddess, for whose protection Vishnu took this particular form, is depicted hanging from the snout of the boar face. A huge *vanamala*, a characteristic iconographic feature of Vishnu, adorns the body of the Nrivaraha. The iconographic composition is completed with representation of miniature figures of sages in horizontal rows on the back wall and river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna on the side walls. Stylistically, the heavy, well sculpted body of the Nrivaraha suggests immense strength and majesty in tune with the whole idea of the composition.

Fig. 4.10 *Sculpture of Vishnu at Udaygiri*

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Cave No. 6 at Udaygiri contains a modest shrine. The notable figure composition of this cave is, interestingly, depicted on the wall outside the chamber. The entrance to the chamber is framed by a decorated jambs and lintels. Flanking the entrance are figures of *dvarapalas* characterized by diaphanous *dhoti* and muscular bodies. This is a beautiful amalgamation of two diverse styles which suggests the intermediary nature of the present composition. The treatment of the body is a legacy of the Kushana style while the diaphanous drapery is a forerunner of the Sarnath style. Other Brahmanical deities carved in the shallow niches on the cave wall are Ganesa, twelve-handed Mahisasuramardini Durga and two *sthanaka* images of four armed Vishnu. The twelve hands of Mahisasuramardini Durga and personified Chakrapurusa and Gadadevi provide evidence of the growing field of iconography.

Terracotta Art

Terracotta art received a new dimension during the Gupta period. The recovery of a large number of terracotta sculptures from different parts of north India suggests that this art form enjoyed wide popularity in the region. In comparison to the earlier period, The terracotta of the Gupta period is large in size. The increase in the size of the terracotta is due to their changed nature of use. The Gupta period marked the beginning in the use of terracotta plaques for the decoration of wall surfaces of shrines and temples. This practice continued even during the medieval period. These plaques were made from single moulds and the minute details like facial features were incised with a sharp pointed object when the clay was still wet.

The hallmark of this art form of the period was life-size free standing images of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna. Their original place was on either side of the entrance to a Siva temple at Ahichchhatra, district Bareilly. Iconographically, the river goddesses are depicted holding water pitcher in their hands and standing atop their *vahanas*. Ganga is shown standing on *makara* while Yamuna stands on a tortoise. They are accompanied by female attendants holding aloft an umbrella over their heads. Stylistically, the deities are depicted standing, turning inwards as if ushering the devotee into the sanctum sanctorum. Their drapery is suggested by closely placed lines across the body as we observed in the Gandhara style. The central figures appear completely in the round. The facial features, however, do not show the beauty and refinement so characteristic of the Gupta tradition.

Fig. 4.11 *River Ganga* *River Yamuna*

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Of the terracotta plaques used for decoration of wall surfaces of temples, as stated earlier, mention may be made of a plaque depicting Vishnu riding on his *vahana*, Garuda. The extant part of the plaque shows the two left hands of the god. The normal hand bears the *sankha* which is placed near his mouth. This suggests that the god is in the act of blowing his conch as a war call also suggested by the associate figure. The other left hand of the god holds a bow. An attendant figure depicted in the act of drawing his bow string is perched on the outstretched left wing of the Garuda. The Garuda is depicted in composite form, with the head of a man and the body of the bird. Another example comes from the site of Saheth-Maheth, identified with ancient Sravasti. The said plaque depicts a four armed Saiva ascetic. Unfortunately, the plaque is broken at the waist. This plaque is notable for the vivid and realistic depiction of the physical form of the ascetic. The advanced age of the ascetic is beautifully suggested by the creases on his face and the shriveled skin. The creased brow, lines on the forehead, drooping eyes and sunken cheeks have been beautifully rendered. His emaciated body is suggested by the skin stretching over his rib cage. However, despite the apparent shriveled physical state the face of the ascetic shows tranquility. The presence of four hands invests the figure with divinity.

4.5 AMRAVATI SCHOOL OF ART

The Buddhist establishment in Amravati was located near Daharanikota, ancient Dhanyakataka, was the capital of the later Satavahanas. The rule of the later Satavahana rule according to inscriptional evidence began with the first quarter of the second century AD and with it began, the most flourishing phase of the Amravati School of Art. The focal point of the Buddhist monastic complex in Amravati was the Great *Stupa* referred to as *Mahachaitya* in the inscriptions. The foundation of the Great *Stupa*, like many others in the north of the Vindhyas, is supposed to have been laid in the period of the Mauryan Emperor, Ashoka. The discovery of a fragment of a polished pillar bearing inscription in the characters of Mauryan Brahmi lends further credence to this assumption. The *stupa* at the site was the largest in this region among all contemporary Buddhist sites. The *stupa* was enclosed with a stone railing which was bereft of any surface decoration similar to the Great *Stupa* at Sanchi. Thereafter, the site underwent several phases of construction that added to its grandeur.

South of the river Narmada, evidence of the dispersion of Buddhism is found from a number of sites in the Andhra region, which have yielded ruins of Buddhist complexes centering on the *stupa*, the main object of veneration during the early period. The little evidence of sculptural panels executed in low relief show affinity with the sculptural styles prevalent in central India during the Sunga period. However, many of these centres survived over many centuries and continued to grow in stature and gave rise to a unique regional style. This regional style dedicated to the service of Buddhism is referred to as the Amravati School of art by art historians owing to the preeminent position achieved by the Buddhist establishment in Amravati- the type site for this art school.

Geo-political Identity of the Region

Not much can be said unambiguously regarding the political history of the Andhra region. The core region of the Andhra was centered on the mouth of the river Krishna, which is referred to as 'Andhrapatha' in an inscription of the third century AD. The thirteenth Rock Edict of Ashoka mentions the Andhras along with the Bhojas. The Bhojas are

Check Your Progress

7. What was the finest creation of Sarnath sculptures based on?
8. What was the hallmark of the terracotta art of Sarnath?

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located in the region of the northern Deccan corresponding to the modern Vidarbha region. This would suggest that the Andhras were located not very far from northern Deccan. The Krishna - Godavari delta referred to as Vengi in ancient times formed the core region where early Buddhist art flourished. Buddhism was introduced in the region by Ashoka as suggested by the presence of rock edicts and pillar fragments. The region of eastern Deccan, corresponding to the erstwhile combined state of Andhra Pradesh, had a number of flourishing Buddhist establishments. The ruins of these establishments have been recovered from numerous sites like Amravati, Nagarjunakonda, Jaggayyapeta, Goli, Ghantasala, Bhattiprolu etc. These establishments flourished under the patronage of the laity, most prominently the wealthy traders who profited immensely from riverine trade along the Krishna.

The Early phase

The early style of this regional school may be studied from a number of sculptural panels found from the site of Jaggayyepeta located along the bank of the river Krishna. This early phase had its beginning sometime in the first century BC. The main features of these sculpted panels like low relief, linear and angular body flexions, typical large turbans, treatment of the drapery etc. all point towards the stylistic qualities prevalent in the Sunga period style of Bharhut and early Sanchi. The raw material used for the panels was marble or limestone. The ease of carving may have been an important factor in this choice.

Architectural features of the *Mahachaitya*

According to the testimony of the inscriptions at Amravati, the sculpted casing slabs of the *stupa* were added when the renowned Buddhist monk, Nagarjuna, resided in the Andhra region. This addition along with that of a highly ornate *vedika* may have taken place over a long period of time as suggested by donative inscriptions which range in time from the reign of Vasisthiputra Pulumavi (c. 130 – 159 AD) to Yajnasri Satakarni (c. 174 – 203 AD), the Satavahana rulers. However, this majestic structure did not survive the vagaries of time. The earliest modern day record of the *stupa* site is preserved in the tour reports of some European archaeologists who visited the site in the nineteenth century. However, a conjectural idea about its dimensions and general appearance can be made from some of the casing sculptural panels which preserved the miniature carvings of the *stupa* itself. Archaeological investigations at the site revealed that the diameter of the dome of the *stupa* at the ground level was approximately hundred and sixty feet and it is estimated that its height may have been around ninety to hundred feet. The *vedika* surrounding the *stupa* had the usual combination of three rails mortised into pail posts and the whole surmounted by a heavy coping stone, similar to those found from Bharhut and existing around the Great *Stupa* at Sanchi.

Fig. 4.12 *Amravati Stupa*

However, the entrance through the railing is different from any example known from the northern Buddhist sites. At Amravati, as revealed by the sculpted casing slabs, the opening in the cardinal directions, instead of being framed by large *toranas*, projected out from the line of the railing, thus, providing an open space from where to view the sculptured niches on the *stupa*. The free standing columns at the end of the entrance projections were surmounted by figures of lions carved in the round. The Amravati *stupa* also had an upper *pradakshina patha* (circumbulatory passage) famed by a railing. In this upper railing solid rectangular panels were joined with the regularly placed uprights. A unique architectural feature of the *sutpas* in this region was the presence of platforms or offsets jutting out from the upper *pradakshina patha*. These projections, also referred to as *ayaka* platform, were also in the cardinal directions, in line with the projecting entrance to the *stupa* proper. The platforms were occupied by five free standing pillars (*ayaka* pillars) surmounted by sacred symbols of Buddhism like the Wheel, *Stupa* etc. The entire body of the *stupa* along with two sets of railing was encased with greenish white limestone panels decorated with elaborate carvings.

Fig. 4.13 *Sculptured panel*

Art style of the *Mahachaitya*

The sculptural panels which form the sole object of surface decoration on the *stupa* depicted scenes from the mortal life of Sakyamuni Buddha, also stories from the Jatakas, stories of previous lives of the Buddha, lotus medallions on the railing posts, procession of *yakshas* on the coping stone etc. Stylistically, the figures of this period were drastically different from the earlier phase which was characterized by low relief and linearity with no suggestion of contouring in the delineation of the human figures. The art style of the second century AD is marked by greater fluidity in the bodily forms, deep carving which help to liberate the individual figures from the background, crowded panels and on the whole a more naturalistic composition. Scholars believe that a careful study of the different panels will highlight influences from regional art centres of the west like Karle, Nasik, Kanheri, etc.

Of the sculptural panels, mention may be made of a particular panel that depicts some important life events of the Buddha-to-be. The side panel depicts four events of the Sakyamuni's life; Maya' dream, interpretation of the dream by the sages, the birth of Prince Siddhartha in the Lumbini grove and the presentation of the new born before the tutelary deity of the Sakya clan. Stylistically, the first factor of consideration is the division of the panel into four sections so that no one scene interferes with the other. To achieve this object, the artist uses diverse architectural forms to create division. The

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upper tier depicts the scene of Maya's dream and its interpretation. A vertical wall is incorporated in the scene to distinguish these two separate events. A similar partition with a vaulted roof suffices for partition in the lower half of the panel. The partitions between the top and bottom scenes have been achieved by the inclusion of railings. Since artistically, the panel belongs to the period of aniconic representation of the Buddha we do not find his anthropomorphic representation in the panel. The human figures in the composition are characterized by slender, elongated forms with tapering lower limbs and greater fluidity of bodily movements. The faces are oval shaped with hair arranged in elaborate coiffures and refined features.

One of the sculptural panels, evidently from a later date indicated by the appearance of the Buddha figures, preserves a very fine reproduction of the Amravati *stupa* itself. The change in the character of the Amravati *stupa* from Hinayana to Mahayana theology is proved by the recovery of a number of such sculpted panels as well as free standing votive images of the Buddha. The latter images provide a balanced view of the stylistic qualities of the Amravati School. The beginning of the appearance of Buddha images is dated to the end of the second and the beginning of the third century AD. Politically, this marks the transition from the Satavahana to the Ikshavaku period. However, with the beginning of anthropomorphic representations of the Buddha the aniconic symbols do not fade out. In fact, at Amravati we have a happy coexistence of symbols and Buddha figures.

From the point of view of composition, the sculptural panels of Amravati School mark continuity from the panels of Sanchi with a continuous narration of stories as seen on the architraves of the *toranas*. Iconographically, the compositions at Amravati are marked by complexity in comparison to that observed at Gandhara.

The free standing images of the Buddha conforming to the Amravati style have huge bodies. They appear to be flat with no hint of modeling of the human physiognomy. In this aspect, they appear to be similar to the Buddha figures of the Kushana period from Mathura. The *sanghati* on the figures remind of the Gandhara tradition with emphasis on prominent folds suggested by deep incised lines. The robe may cover either the shoulders or only the left one. The faces are narrow oval with a prominent *urna* and elongated ears. The face appears rigid with no hint of expression or emotion. The hair on the head is fashioned like small curls covering also the small insignificant *usnisa*.

Amravati style at Nagarjunakonda

The site of Najarjunakonda had a large Buddhist establishment that flourished under the Ikshavaku rule. The monastic establishment that existed at the site from the second to the fourth centuries AD had more than thirty structural units. The complex had several groups of monuments, some units had *stupa* and a monastery, others had apsidal *chaitya* and monastery while still others had all the three components. The site also had numerous isolated *stupas* as well as votive *stupas*. The archaeological evidence and inscriptional records recovered from the site show that four different Buddhist sects were functioning at the site. The monuments that are preserved at the present site of Nagarjunakonda are not in their original context. The construction of the Nagarjunasagar dam threatened the very existence of the ancient site and the ruins of which were spread over a large area in the valley. In an ambitious plan, the Government of India decided to relocate the important structures of the valley to the hill-top. The site was excavated, its cultural phases documented and recorded in detail and thereafter the monuments were reconstructed on their present location.

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The main *stupa* at Nagarjunakonda revealed a new and unique architectural style hitherto unknown in the *stupas* of north India. The large size of the *stupa* drum hindered their construction in conformity to the prevalent style of piling up a high tumulus of earth and brick courses. In the new technique, the main concern was to provide stability to the huge dome. This necessity was met by the use of Wheel shaped foundation design in the core. The centre of the core was constructed like a solid brick pillar with brick walls in the form of spokes radiating out to the periphery. Concentric brick circles further dissected the spokes leading to the creation of small vacant cells. The cells thus formed were filled up with earth. This architectural technique of constructing *stupas* was repeated at a number of sites in the Andhra region. The *stupa* at Nagarjunakonda had a basal diameter of hundred and six feet and the drum possibly reached a height of seventy to eighty feet.

As at Amravati, the sculptural panels encasing the *stupas* along with the free standing votive images have been found from Nagarjunakonda. On the whole, stylistically, the sculptures from the site show the continuation of the Amravati School style of the later period. Comparatively, the examples from Nagarjunakonda appear more slender, fluid and proportionate. The sculptural panels are marked by vitality and classy spatial planning.

4.6 SUMMING UP

- The study of 'Ancient Indian Art'is basically the study of Indian religion. Art and architecture in India have been always subservient to the cause of religious glory. This explanation is universally applicable to Brahamanical religion as well as the protestant religious movements of Buddhism and Jainism.
- The geo-political units that were the mainstayof the Saka-Parthian rule in the north-west are generally clubbed under the name Gandhara.
- The small geo-political region having been the playing field of numerous west Asian, central Asian and south Asian population groups left its indelible mark of the art tradition of the region which cumulatively gave rise to the famed 'Gandhara Art'.
- Gandhara Art as we know it today is an amalgamation of a number of diverse traits drawn from Hellenistic, Indian, west Asiatic (Iranian) and Central Asian tribal elements.
- Excavations at the site of Begram, the ancient capital city of Kapisa, yielded a hoard of art objects having diverse affiliation- Hellenistic, Chinese, West Asian, Roman, Alexandrian and, of course, Indian.
- Another notable antiquity from the Kapisa region is the gold reliquary found from Bimaran, Afghanistan. The reliquary was discovered by Charles Masson. This reliquary was found in association with four copper coins of Azes II in mint condition and an inscribed steatite casket within which the reliquary was placed.
- The largest and the most famous city of the Gandhara region was undoubtedly Taxila, as the Greeks knew it, or Takshashila, the Sanskritised name. This famous city was identified with the ruins of Sirkap.
- The first settlement at the site was established by the Bactrian Greeks in the second century BC.

Check Your Progress

9. What was the focal point of the Buddhist monastic complex in Amravati?
10. What was the characteristic of sculptural panels in the stupa in Mahachaitya of Amravati?

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- Another structure found during the excavations at Sirkap was a basement of a *stupa* that no longer exists. This structure is important in that it shows an amalgamation of Indian and Hellenistic architectural motifs as surface decoration.
- Archaeological investigations in the Swat valley have revealed that the region played an important role in the development of Buddhist ideology in this region but also in the efflorescence of Buddhist art.
- A clear example of the Parthian influence in the Swat valley comes from a stone sculpture of the seated Buddha. The sculpture carved in grey stone depicts the Buddha seated on a floral pedestal flanked to his right and left by Brahma and Indra respectively.
- The mighty and famous Kushana emperors who ruled over large parts of north India were originally a nomadic tribe of Central Asia. According to several Chinese historical texts they were members of the Yueh-chi tribe.
- The conquest of Punjab by Kadphises II paved the way for Kanishka, the most dynamic ruler of the Kushana dynasty, to extend his political suzerainty over large parts of mainland India. His Empire, at its zenith, extended from Bihar in the east to Khorasan in the west and from Khotan in the north to Konkan in the south.
- A tradition recorded by Al Beruni states that his rule extended over Afghanistan and parts of Central Asia.
- Kanishka was a great patron of Buddhism, but it does not appear that he was a practicing Buddhism.
- The date of Kanishka is placed around the close of the first century AD and is generally accepted by historians and scholars that the Saka Era beginning in 78 AD actually refers to the beginning of Kanishka's reign.
- Kanishka was succeeded by Vasishka who reigned for small time. He was succeeded by Huvishka, another shining light in the Kushana dynasty. Huvishka ruled for a long time. In fact,he ruled jointly with Vasishka II and his son Kanishka II.
- Buddhism entered into the north-west region of the sub-continent under the missionary zeal of the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka.
- Another site having ruins of Buddhist monastic establishment of the Kushana period is Takht-i-Bahi in Pakistan. The excavations at the site revealed massive complex comprising of open courtyards surrounded by cells, *stupas* and dwelling units.
- The famous Gandhara School of Art had its beginning in the pre-Christian Era and continued to blossom till fifth century AD. However, the zenith of this school corresponded with the rule of the Kushanas who undoubtedly gave patronage to art practices in the region.
- A dominant feature of what we today recognise as the Gandhara trait is the presence of Hellenistic art styles devoted to the cause of the propagation of Buddhist faith.
- Predominantly Gandhara art objects were fashioned out of stone, particularly grey schist, stucco, terracotta and very few of the metal.

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- Of the very few metal objects of the Kushana period, mention may be made of the 'Kanishka reliquary' found from the *stupa* of Kanishka at Shah-ji-ki-Dheri. The modern site corresponds to ancient Kanishkapura, capital city established by Kanishka, near modern Peshawar, Pakistan.
- The original *stupa*, at the time of its construction was perhaps one of the largest *stupa*s and a specimen of Kushana architectural feat.
- Bodhisattvas were another popular subject in the Gandhara School. In Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas are defined as beings that have the requisite qualities of attaining Buddhahood but have not yet attained it.
- An important contribution of the Gandhara art is the representation of the life-events of the Buddha's life in narrative panels.
- Panini, a renowned grammarian of about the second century BC, refers to Andhakas and Vrishnis of Mathura in his book *Astadhyayi*. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya, datable to the Mauryan period, mentions that the Vrishnis were a *sangha* i.e., they had a republican form of government.
- Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the court of the Mauryan Emperor Chgandragupta Maurya at Pataliputra, informs us that during his time the Surasema capital, Mathura, was a centre of worship of Krishna.
- As a geo-political unit, Mathura also had a close relation with the development of different religious ideologies which ultimately provided the necessary influence for the development of Mathura Art.
- As early as the second century BC Mathura was a prominent centre of Bhagawata religion centering around Vasudeva Krishna and the other Vrishni heroes, Samkarshana (Balarama), Pradyumna (son of Krishna by Rukmini), Samba (son of Krishna by Jambavati) and Aniruddha (son of Pradyumna).
- Mathura was a prominent centre of Jaina religion attested by the discovery of the ruins of a Jaina *stupa* at Kakkali Tila along with other objects of worship. Symbolic, worship of Buddha in the form of the Bodhi Tree and *Chakra* was also practised here.
- After the demise of the Mauryan political suzerainty the region around Mathura came to be ruled by local chiefdoms. A large number of inscribed cast copper coins bearing 'Mitra' and 'Datta' ending names have been found from the town and its environs.
- During the period of Saka domination in the north-west, Maues, the Saka ruler, extended his control further into the Indian territory and extended eastwards up to Mathura.
- The earliest art objects recovered from Mathura are datable to the second century BC. Though the reported specimens do not form part of the Mathura School atelier they no doubt shed light on the antecedence of an art movement in the region.
- Among the pre-Kushana art specimens found from Mathura mention may be made of a standing female figurine, Jaina *ayagapattas* and free standing images of *Yaksha-Yakshi* etc. A sculptural panel discovered from the site of Isapur in Mathura stylistically suggests a Saka era date.

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- The Buddha and Bodhisattva images carved in the Mathura style betray theindigenous stylistic idiom that developed during the centuries of the pre-Christian Era.
- The chief characteristic of the Mathura School of Art that at once identifies its provenance is its stone medium. The ateliers of the Mathura School utilized the spotted red sandstone from Sikri for their sculptural repertoire.
- Excavations at the site of Mat (on the east bank of the Yamuna), in Mathura, gave evidence of a one of its kind royal shrine of the Kushanas.
- Vishnu images in the collection of Mathura Museum depict the four-handed variety holding *gada*, *chakra* and *kamandalu*. The one right hand displays the *abhaya mudra* or the *varada mudra*. In some images, the *gada* is replaced by the *shankha*. *Padma*, a characteristic attribute of Vishnu images are not found this early in the art of Mathura.
- Images of Siva of the Kushana period were restricted to symbolic and anthropomorphic representations. The former took the form of *Linga* or phallus. The Mathura craftsmen mastered the unique style of combining the *Linga* and the anthropomorphic forms and gave rise to the *Mukhalingas*.
- Skanda-Karttikeya, son of Siva, is also well represented in the early Kushana art of Mathura. He is the god of warfare and commander of the divine army.
- The site of Kankila Tila seems to have been an important centre of Jaina ideology. The site preserves the ruins of the only known Jaina *stupa*.
- After the decline of the Kushana Empire, there was political disintegration of the erstwhile Kushana Empire and a number of small kingdoms and principalities sprung from its ruins. This political ambiguity continued into till the first quarter of the fourth century AD.
- Chandragupta I was succeeded by his son Samudragupta. According to the testimony of the Allahabad Pillar Inscription he vanquished several regional rulers in Ganga plains and subdued the tribal and forest people.
- Chandragupta Vikramaditya was succeeded by his son Kumaragupta I who ruled in relative peace and calm, disturbed only towards the fag end of his reign.
- The Gupta Empire was analogous with the rise of Brahmanical religion. The Gupta rulers were '*parambhagawatas*'.
- The 'Classical' element of the Gupta period extended into the field of language and literature. Sanskrit language came to occupy a place of prominence.
- Modern day settlement of Sarnath (ancient Migadaya, Rishipattana, Isipatana and Sarangnath) is located at a distance of 13km north east of Varanasi.
- Central India appears to have been an important centre of art activities patronized by the Gutpa rulers, particularly Chandragupta II Vikramaditya. The epi-centre of this activity was around Udaygiri and Sanchi.
- Terracotta art received a new dimension during the Gupta period. The recovery of a large number of terracotta sculptures from different parts of north India suggests that this art form enjoyed wide popularity in the region.
- As at Amravati, the sculptural panels encasing the *stupas* along with the free standing votive images have been found from Nagarjunakonda.

4.7 KEY TERMS

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- **Abhaya mudra:** It is a gesture suggesting protection and reassurance displayed by the divinities of Buddhist and Brahmanical pantheon.
- **Aniconic:** Symbols used to suggest the presence of a divinity.
- **Apsidal:** An architectural form which on plan appears as a rectangle closed at one end by a semi-circle, in other words having a 'U' shaped plan.
- **Chaitya:** a Buddhist shrine where the main object of veneration is the stupa, symbolic of the Buddha or the Buddha himself.
- **Dharmachakra:** Buddhist 'Wheel of Law'. In Hinayana Buddhism, the Dharmachakra is also used to symbolically represent Sakyamuni Buddha.
- **Mahayana Buddhism:** A branch of Buddhism that came into prominence after the beginning of the Christian era that advocates the transference of merit, prajanaparamita.
- **Panchayatana:** a form of temple architecture has one central and four subsidiary shrines.
- **Saiva:** affiliated and related to Siva, including his family and ganas.
- **Salabhanjika:** A decorative motif depicting a beautiful damsel in close association with a tree.
- **Sthanaka:** Images of divinities depicting in standing pose.
- **Triratna:** A sacred motif of Buddhist theology symbolizing the concept of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.
- **Urna:** One of the sixteen auspicious marks that appear on the body of a great ascetic or a great monarch.
- **Usnisa:** Another one of the sixteen auspicious marks that appear on the body of a great ascetic or a great monarch.
- **Vaishnava:** Affiliated to or relating to Visnu.
- **Vedika:** A railing enclosure of a sacred place.
- **Viharas:** Buddhist monastic establishment.
- **Vidyadharas:** Celestial beings depicted flying over the head of divinities often bearing garlands.
- **Yaksa:** A folk deity, nature spirits and guardian of wealth and treasure.
- **Yakshi:** The female counterpart of Yaksas; closely associated with fertility.

4.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The largest and the most famous city of the Gandhara region was undoubtedly Taxila, as the Greeks knew it, or Takshashila, the Sanskritised name.
2. Buddhism entered into the north-west region of the sub-continent under the missionary zeal of the Mauryan emperor, Ashoka.
3. In Buddhism, the Bodhisattvas are defined as beings that have the requisite qualities of attaining Buddhahood but have not yet attained it.

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4. The chief characteristic of the Mathura School of Art is its stone medium.
5. A typical representative of the Mathura School is the life-size free standing image of a Bodhisattva.
6. The images of the Greco-Roman divinities formed the basis of the Buddha and the Bodhisattava images in the Gandhar School of art, while the life-size images of Yaksha formed the basis of the Buddha and the Bodhisattava images in the Mathura School of art.
7. The finest creation of the Sarnath sculpture is based on Buddhism.
8. The hallmark of terracotta art of Sarnath was life-size free standing images of the river goddesses Ganga and Yamuna.
9. The focal point of the Buddhist monastic complex in Amravati was the Great *Stupa* referred to as *Mahachaitya* in the inscriptions.
10. The sculptural panels which form the sole object of surface decoration on the *stupa* in Mahachaitya of Amravati depicted scenes from the mortal life of Sakyamuni Buddha, also stories from the Jatakas, stories of previous lives of the Buddha, lotus medallions on the railing posts, procession of *yakshas* on the coping stone etc.

4.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. How did Emperor Ashoka introduce Buddhism to north-western region of the Indian sub-continent?
2. Write a short note on the sculptural art in the Bactro-Gandhar region.
3. What were the stylistic features of the Mathura School of Art?
4. Differentiate between the Gandhara School of Art and the Mathura School of Art.
5. Write a note on the rock-cut architecture of Sarnath.
6. What were the characteristic features of art and architecture of Nagarjunakonda?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the role of the Kushanas in the development of art and architecture in the north-western region of the Indian sub-continent.
2. Describe the features of royal portraits and Saiva sculptures of the Mathura School of Art.
3. Assess the role of the Gupta kings in the development of art and architecture of Sarnath.
4. Discuss the features of architecture of *Mahachaityas* of Amravati.

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UNIT 5 ART AND SCULPTURE OF ASSAM

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STRUCTURE

5.0 INTRODUCTION

The art and architecture of Assam has its distinct regional characteristics. The Tantric cult, practiced at Kamakhya, is quite well known. The society of ancient Kamarupa, in spite of its distinct characteristics was considerably influenced by Brahmanical rituals and practices. The art and architecture in this region was influenced by Gupta style of art, which is the Nagara style of art and architecture predominantly found in North India.

However local elements are also to be found ingrained in it. Unfortunately, only the ruins of these architecture and sculpture remain. Architectural remains belonging to periods ranging from the fifth-sixth century A.D. are to be found in Tezpur, Kamakhya, Hajo Dabaka, Numaligarh, Sibsagar and Sadiya. In this province, the art, sculpture and iconography flourished under dynasties like the Vermans, Salastambhas, Palas, Ahoms.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Identify the dynasties which ruled Ancient Assam
- Discuss the architecture of Assam
- Describe the sculptural forms found in Assamese architecture

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5.2 ANCIENT ASSAM

Assam, in the Ahom language means 'peerless'. However in ancient times, Assam was known as *Pragjyotisa*. This term has been mentioned in the Ramayana and also occurs several times in the Mahabharata. The Mahabharata refers to the army of Bhagadatta as composed of *china* and *Kirata* soldiers. The *chinas* were the people of Tibet region since China was often known as *Mahachina* which was to the south-east of Tibet. Again the term Kiratas were generally used for the Himalayan mountaineers of the Mongoloid stock. In the *Kalika Purana*, kiratas are described as the original inhabitants of Assam. In his travel account, Hiuen Tsang described this territory as Kamrupa. During medieval period, Kamrupa gained popularity owing to the Tantrik cult and came to be considered as the most sacred place because of the temple of goddess, Kamakhya. With the gradual spread of Aryan culture from the 4th century AD from the heartland of India into the Brahmaputra valley, the Brahmanical custom had deeply penetrated the society. This was evident in the practice of Vedic rituals in the everyday life of the people and the use of Sanskrit mostly by the elite groups in the society. The modern Assamese language is also derived from Sanskrit.

The legendary account of Assam is described in a Sanskrit text, *Hargaurisamvada.* The work contains an account of rulers and dynasties, particularly Kamrupa. Ancient Assam was ruled by several kingdoms. In the early 20th century, British historians like Edward Gait and Assamese historians like Kanaklal Barua wrote on Assam. Their work gives an account of the political and cultural history of Assam.

The historical account of Assam starts with the establishment of Varman dynasty. Pushya Varman founded Kamarupa kingdom in the 4th century. Maharajadhiraj Pushya Varman (350-380 AD), was the first well known ruler of Kamarupa. He was a contemporary of Gupta emperor Samudragupta. As the frontier kingdom of the Guptas, Kamarupa often became the bone of contention and occasional conflicts took place.

The Varman kingdom reached its glory under the king Bhaskar Varman in the 7th century. Xuanzang visited his court and left behind a significant account. Bhaskar Varman died without any heir so the control of the country passed to one Salasthamba, who established the Mlechchha dynasty. After the decline of the Mlechchha dynasty in the late 9th century, a new ruler, Brahmapala, who was elected by local residents, established the Pala dynasty. The last Pala king was removed by the Gaur king, Ramapala, in 1110. But the two subsequent kings, Timgyadeva and Vaidyadeva, although established by the Gaur kings, ruled mostly as independents and issued grants. Three dynasties flourished in the Pre-Ahom period. These are Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties.

Check Your Progress

1. What was Assam known as in ancient times?
2. Name the Sanskrit text which gives a legendary account of Assam.
3. Who founded the kingdom of Kamarupa?

The Pala rule in Assam came to an end by the end of 12th century AD. The Tais, who later came to be known as Ahoms, entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of 13th century from upper Burma region. They ruled the Brahmaputra valley from the second quarter of 13th century to the second quarter of 19th century. During this period, besides Ahom, the Koch, Kachari, Chutiã and Jaintiã ruled different parts of Assam.

Except the Jaintiã, who ruled in the Jaintia hills of present Meghalaya, other dynasties followed architectural activities extensively.

The Ãhoms first established their capital at Caraideo under the leadership of Sukapha, the first Ahom ruler in the Brahmaputra valley.

5.3 ARCHITECTURE OF ASSAM

NOTES

The existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, and other deities is attested by both inscriptions as well as contemporary literature. Hiuen Tsang, in his account, mentions the existence of hundreds of *Deva* temples in Kamarupa. There are quite a few inscriptional references to the erection of temples in Pre-Ahom Assam. The ruins of temples do not show that Assam developed an independent architectural style in the beginning. The architectural style in Assam was influenced to a great degree by the Gupta style of art and architecture. The bold scroll floral design seen at Kamakhya is the proto-type scroll of fourth to fifth century of Bhumara.

When the Gupta dynasty started collapsing, the art activities also suffered. Kamarupa, the bordering Kingdom of the Gupta Empire under the Varman rulers, however, continued the Gupta style of art. Some influence of Gupta art or architecture could be even seen in the work of the days of the Salastambha rulers. The plinth of the ruined temple at Dah Parvatia consists of *garbhagriha* and *mandapa* which clearly depicts the architectural style of the Guptas. From the beginning of the Varman dynasty till the Salastambha dynasty, the architectural activities can be traced systematically in and around Tezpur. The ruined temples at Bamuni Pahar, Majgaon, architectural components preserved in the Cole Park, Tezpur bear testimony to this fact. The temples of Assam belonging to the Pre-Ahom period certainly resemble the Indo-Aryan style with slight variations. But, some peculiar styles, designs were influenced by the central Indian architecture style, which no doubt was the soul of the Pre-Ahom architecture style in Assam.

But, in case of Gajathara motif, Deccan influence is noticed. There may be influence of other architectural style including the indigenous additions in the Pre-Ahom architecture, although it is a product of the Indo-Aryan style.

Initially, due to political instability, the Ahom rulers could not concentrate on architectural activities. The Ahom architecture was in accordance with the Indo-Aryan style, but was greatly influenced by the Islamic style as well. In pre-Ahom and during the Ahom period, influence from South East Asia did impact the architecture of Assam. But the influence of East appeared to be very less in comparison to the West due to communication and geographical factors.

The Assamese temple art and sculpture is a reflection of broad aspects such as myths, customs, mythology, beliefs, and cults which are aesthetically reflected through the sculptural motifs found in symbolic representations. The grandeur of the Assamese art and architecture has been enhanced by the composition of different art, myths and sculptures. The regional variation is clearly represented in some of the architectural elements.

5.3.1 Early Phase

Today, huge heaps of ruins of ancient architecture lay scattered throughout the state. The remains include architecture and fortifications, sculpture designs, icons, and few specimens of painting. Literary accounts and epigraphy point to the artistic activities of the rulers. Besides the temples at Hajo, Kamakhaya, Sadiya, which are mentioned in the Puranas and the Tantras, we find an earlier reference to a Sun temple in Kamarupa in the *Markandeya Purana*. Yuan Chwang refers to hundreds of deva temples during the 700 BCE. It is proved by the remains of Dah Parvatia. Epigraphy makes references not

NOTES

only to the erection of temples but also to buildings of a secular nature. The Tezpur grant of Vanamala states that the king repaired the fallen lofty temple of Shiva.

The ruins of palatial buildings that have been discovered indicate that these architectural remains belong to secular art. Hence, the conclusion arrived at by B.K. Barua, 'We have, thus, no information of the secular architecture of the period', may be incorrect. It is worth noting that the remains that have been discovered so far from the land, point to the conclusion that no sharp distinction can be drawn between temples dedicated to Vishnu, Shiva, Devi and the likes. Not only do we find remains of temples dedicated to different deities in a single spot at Hajo and Tezpur but also in a single sculpture and images showing other deities. In other words, the water-tight divisions of architecture into Shaivite, Vishnuvite and Buddhistic or the general conception that the Vishnu shrine was confined only to Northern India and that of Shiva to Southern India, or that the Vishnu shrine is influenced by Indo-Aryan style of architecture and the stupa influenced by Dravidian style cannot be justified on the basis of the ruins that were discovered from Assam.

Architectural Remains

Darrang (now Tezpur) Ruins of Dah Parvatia: The temple ruins at Dah Parvatia are one of the earliest specimens of architectural and stone carving in Assam belonging to the 5th-6th century A.D. The door-frame of Dah Parvatia is one of the best specimen of the Gupta School of Art. The carving on the jambs is continued overhead in four of the five bands; the lowest part of the jamb consisting in high relief the figures of river goddesses Jamuna and Ganga with their attendants. In the fourth band the pilaster appears to support an architrave bearing on it five *caitya* windows of two types: a) a trefoil in which all three arcs are of the same size; there are three caitya windows with such medallions , one in the centre and two near the ends; b) also trefoils in which the upper arc is larger than the two arcs on the sides. The central medallion of these five contains a seated figure of Lakulisa Siva. There are five bands of ornament on each jamb containing :-

- A meandering creeper rising above the head of a Naga.
- The body of the Naga and Nagi rising from the top of the square panel at the bottom of each jamb and continued between the first and the second bands of the lintel. The tails of these to serpents are held by the figures of Garuda in high relief.
- Ornamental foliage consisting of a straight stem.
- A pilaster, squre in section bearing on it square bosses covered with arabesque as projections, which acts as supports to a number of human or divine figures and ends in a cruciform bracket capital.
- A double intertined creeper forming conventional rosettes which is continued on the side projection of the lintel.

1. **Tezpur Remains**: The modern town of Tezpur contains a number of ancient remains of temples and buildings. The shrines were dedicated to Surya, Shiva and Buddha as well. The most important specimens, divided into three groups, are described below.
    - The most remarkable sculpture in the first group is the two shafts of pillars and a huge lintel. The shaft of one pillar is 16 sided, indicating that this was a Shiva temple as this kind of pillar is generally found in a Shiva shrine. In the

NOTES

second pillar, the upper part of the shaft is dodecagonal and the top is divided into three horizontal bands. Both the pillars contain floral and other designs. The lintel is divided into two parts; the upper part contains miniature temple patterns with the phallic emblem of Shiva. The lower part is decorated with the figure of Ganesha and other designs. The nature of the carvings indicates that the temple was built during 10th century A.D.

- The second group of sculptures consists of specimens from a gigantic temple. The door sill and the lintel, which is huge in size, determine the size of the door frame. There are the three raised panels on it, each of which is divided into a larger niche in the centre with a smaller one each side. The sculptural remains indicate that a gigantic temple depicted to Surya exists.
- A number of carved stones or pieces of pillar belonging to another temple lay scattered. Most of the carved stones are from the plinth moldings and string courses of a gigantic temple. The string courses contain beautiful ornamentations. At the centre of some of the stone pieces there is a projecting niche flanked by round pilasters with divine figures. In some of the niches, there are figures of Saraswati, Shiva and Durga seated in their conventional style, common in North India. The outlines of plinth moldings contain beautiful sculpture designs. The most remarkable specimen of the collection is a slab from the upper part of the plinth moldings. It is divided into sunken panels by means of circular pilasters each containing a male or a female or two males or two females. The figures depict a man fighting with a lion, another man playing on a drum and another dancing. Another slab contains chaitya window patterns. The second group of sculptures belongs to a temple dating around 12th century A.D.
- Two other specimens from the area appear to belong to another temple. One of them is a stone jamb from a door and the second a slab with three sunken panels occupied by human or divine figures. From Visvanatha, Bihali Gomiri and the neighbouring places, similar ruins of temples dedicated mainly to Shiva and Devi with their emblems and other sculpture specimens have been discovered. The ancient remains show carved blocks of stone.

2. **Bamuni Hill Remains**: Another important spot of archaeological interest is the Bamuni Hill, near Tezpur. The area contains ruins of temples and specimens of sculpture belonging to the period not later than 8th-9th century AD. Like those at Dah Parvatia, the temples of this area were dedicated to different gods like Vishnu, Shiva. The important specimens are as follows:
   - Some pavements inside the *garbha ghrihas* of the larger shrines are still intact.
   - A natural structure forming part of a larger temple with a circular sculpture door step lies between the sanctum and its *mandapa*.
   - A cross-shaped bracket and a huge lintel ornamental with horned *kirtimukhas.*
   - Door jambs with miniature floral patterns and other designs
   - Many square brackets with panels and bas-reliefs; one of them bearing the figures of a male and a female.
3. **Ruins at Sadiya**: In the extreme north-east region of Assam lie Sadiya and Kundina where remains of temples and buildings, including the Copper temple dedicated to Devi have been discovered. On the walls and buildings of the temples there are

NOTES

various sculpture designs, including human figures, animals, birds , flowers, geometrical designs and some are depicted in erotic style like those at Dimapur. Prthu, another king of Kamarupa built an extensive fortification as a defense against the invasion of Bakhtiyar in Jalpaiguri.

4. **Nowgong ruins**: The present district of Nowgong contains enormous ruins of temples and buildings, which may be placed between A.D. 600 and 1200. The remains in the area show that the shrines were dedicated to different deities and some of the specimens indicate strong non-Aryan influence. The areas where architectural remains can be found are described below.
   - **Chanchauki**: The remains from this place include carved blocks of stone. One door piece contains figures of a *dvarapala* dancer and a female worshipper; another slab shows a pair of *mithan* in embrace.
   - **Kawaimari**: The remains from the area reveal the existence of a big temple and include stone pieces bearing various human, animal and floral designs.
5. **Guwahati ruins:** The region in and around Guahati abounds in architectural ruins. The temple of Kamakhya is one of the earliest Sakti shrine in the region (details of the Kamakhya temple has been dealt with separately). About three miles from Kamakhaya lay Pandu which also has remains of temples and images. Temple ruins and sculpture specimens lie scattered in Umananda, Asvakranta, Urvasi, Manikannesvara, Sukresvara, Navgraha and places near Guwahati.

5.3.2 Palas and their Contributions to Art and Architecture

The Pala empire was among the most famous kingdoms of India that existed from A.D. 750–1174. The rulers came from a Buddhist dynasty in Bengal, in the eastern region of the country. Their rivals often described the Palas as the *Lords of Gauda*. They were ardent followers of the Mahayana and Tantric schools of Buddhism. The first ruler was Gopala. He came to power in A.D. 750 in Gaur through a democratic election, which is regarded as being the first democratic election in South Asia since the age of the *Maha Janapadas*. Gopala reigned from AD 750–770 and strengthened his position by gradually controlling the whole of Bengal.

The empire flourished as under the aegis of Dharmapala and Devapala. A Pala copperplate inscription reveals that Devapala conquered the Utkalas, the Pragjyotisha, the Hunas, and the lords of Pratiharas, Gurjara and the Dravidas. The death of Devapala temporarily put a halt to the growing Pala Empire, and several autonomous dynasties and kingdoms surfaced in the interim period.

However, Mahipala I invigorated the rule of the Palas. He regained the Pala control of Bengal, and survived the invasions of Rajendra Chola and the Chalukyas. Following his death, the empire once again slowed down until Ramapala, the last truly competent ruler of the dynasty, managed to retrieve its position. He thwarted the Varendra rebellion and stretched his empire farther to Kamarupa, Orissa and northern India.

The Palas were responsible for introducing Mahayana Buddhism in Tibet, Bhutan and Myanmar. They also had extensive trade in South-east Asia. This is evidenced in architectural style of the Sailendra Empire (present-day Java, Malaya, and Sumatra).

The Pala Empire finally disintegrated in 12th century A.D., severely weakened by the attacks of the Sena dynasty, and the subsequent and more destructive invasions of Bakhtiyar Khilji's Muslim armies.

Check Your Progress

4. Which temple has been mentioned in the Markandeya Purana?
5. Where do we find the earliest specimens of architectural and stone carving in Assam?
6. What is Pala School of sculptural art?
7. Name the monastery built by Dharmapala.

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Pala Art and Architecture

The best aspect of the Pala empire was its excellence in art and sculptures. The Palas were responsible for creating a unique form of Buddhist art called the 'Pala School of Sculptural Art'. The enormous structures of Vikramshila Vihara, Odantapuri Vihara, and Jagaddala Vihara were classic illustrations of their architectural brilliance. Sadly, these wonderful structures were destroyed by Bakhtiar Khilji's forces.

Apart from building several temples and works of art, they also supported the universities of Nalanda and Vikramashila. The Somapura Mahaviharaa, a creation of Dharmapala, at Paharpur, Bangladesh, is the biggest Buddhist monastery in the Indian subcontinent. It was accorded the honour of a World Heritage Site by UNESCO, in 1985.

The Pala architectural style can be experienced extensively in many parts of South-east Asia, China, Japan, and Tibet. There were several great sculptors in that period, of which Dhimanand and Vittpala were the two most celebrated. Dr. Stella Kramrisch, a renowned authority in Indian art, says, 'The art of Bihar and Bengal exercised a lasting influence on that of Nepal, Burma, Ceylon and Java.'

Sena Art and Architecture

The Sena empire ruled Bengal in the 11th and 12th centuries. The dynasty was founded by Hemanta Sen. Hemanta Sen usurped power from the Pala ruler and established the Sena dynasty. He was succeeded by Vijay Sen, who laid the foundation of the dynasty, and ruled over a period of 60 years.

The Sena dynasty is famous for building Hindu temples and monasteries. This includes the Dhakeshwari temple, which is now in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The Sena rulers seem to have built a temple in Kashmir, which is ascribed to Ballala Sena. Some Bengali authors believe that Jayadeva, the renowned Sanskrit poet and author of *Gita Govinda,* was one of the *Pancharatnas* (five gems) in the court of Lakshman Sen.

The influence of the above mentioned school of art can well be seen in the architectural sculptures discovered in early Assam datable to the period between 9th to 12th century AD. Close political contacts with Bengal and the evidence of trade routes between earstwhile Kamarupa and Bengal could have easily facilitated the travel of artists and idioms from the domain of the Palas and Senas to Kamarupa. Most of the post-Varman and pre-Ahom sculptures show affinity to the Pala school of art. The typical characteristics of Pala art as seen in the religious images found in the region were: (i) *Silapatta* (stele) and a *Sirachakra* (halo); (ii) the stele was decorated with the figure of a *Kirtimukha* (a fierce stylized lion's head) at the apex, flanked by two *vidyadhara* (Semi-divine aerial beings) on its upper part. By the 11th century the top of the stele became more pointed and intricately decorated and by the 12th century the use of the fine grained, hard, black basalt rock or the *kasauti pathar* came to be increasingly used in the sculptures of the period. A few icons including the one of Surya found in the Gauhati region bear typical characteristics of Pala art like softness in facial expression and decorated but uncrowded stele. The close affinity to the Pala school can well be seen in the bronze icons unearthed at Narakasura Hill as suggested by B.N Mukherjee. The same can be said of the representation of Brahma and Indra discovered at Gauhati and also of the images of Brahma and dancing Ganesha found near Tezpur belonging to the late 10th century and 12th century respectively.

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5.4 SCULPTURE OF ASSAM

The majority of the sculptures that have been found in the province are of gods, goddesses and other semi-divine figures which served as ornaments in the architectural designs. These figures were executed in conformity with the canons laid down in *Silpa-Sastras*, and as such they resemble in form, proportion and features sculptures similar to that of north-eastern India of the period. The sculptures of this province may be divided into three groups:

- Sculpture of human forms
- Sculpture of animal forms
- Sculptural designs

The sculpture of human forms can be further classified into:

- Representation of gods and goddesses
- Representation of human figures

Images of Yaksa and Yaksini

Representation of human forms other than those of gods and goddesses is limited. The most common forms of this type are the figures of *Yaksa, yaksini, vidyadharas* which seem to be more humane than divine in form. Representation of *yaksa, yaksini, vidyadharas, gandharava, apsara, kinnara* occur in all early forms of architecture. They are usually made to serve as special attendants to the deities sculptured on the walls of a temple, and sometimes as *chowrie*-bearers. They are generally depicted with two hands, two eyes and a *karandamukta*. Occasionally, one comes across figures with more than two hands. One such figure is depicted in illustration 1 of Fig. 5.1. The ceiling slab from the Shiva temple, Deo Parbat, bears the carving of an embossed lotus (visva padma).

The second vessel of the *visva padma* bears in relief the figure of a vidyadhara holding a scarf or a necklace with both hands and hovering in the sky as if to make obeisance to the deity below. His legs are so arranged as to be symmetrical with the circular course, a feature generally found in the Gupta and Pala sculptures. While the facial designs have local influence, the decorative and anatomical details of the *vidyadhara* resemble the features of the late Gupta and Pala period. A high crown (*kirita-mukuta*) with a frontal coronet adorns his head, perforated *patra kundala* are seen in the ears.

Dvarapala and *dvarapalika* are seen at the entrance of almost every temple. The *dvarapalikas*, usually, hold symbols representing the deity of the temple over which they keep guard, in their hands. The door-keepers of the Saiva temple at Gachtal Nowgog, for instance are seen holding saivite symbols such as *sula* and *pasa*. Figures of dvrapalas are seen in a Vishnu temple, in North Gauhati. Here, the *dvarpalas* are standing on both legs indicating alertness and firmness. A richly adorned *dvarapalika* in the *tribhanga* pose with her right leg resting on the left is to be found in Assam Provincial Museum in Gauhati. She wears circular ear ornaments and a number of *haras*. Her girdle and flow of the lower garment are gracefully designed.

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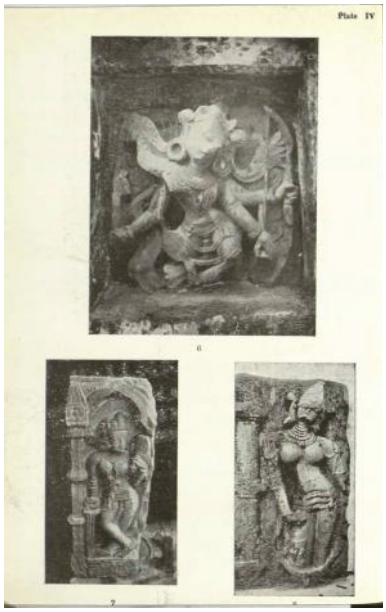

Fig. 5.1 *1. Kinnari Guwahati 2. Dwarpalika 3. Dwarpalika Sibsagar*

The earliest representation of a human figure is found on some terracotta plaques recovered in 1926 from the ruins at Dah Parbatiya which according to the moulding of the torso and the general technique, remarks R. D. Banerji, proves beyond doubt that these plaques cannot date later than 6th C.E. They depict poise and the naturalism of the human figures.

Mithuna Figures

An interesting architectural figure found on the panels of the Shiva and Shakti shrines depicts a couple having coitus. Sanskrit verse represents Shiva as saying, '*maithunena mahayogi mama tulyo no samsayah'*. It is also a fact that the left-hand *sakta* rites are connected with the performance of the five *ma-karas* namely *watsy, mudra, mamsa*, and *maithuna*. The concurrence of these figures mainly in Shiva and Shakti temples as suggested by Sir William Rosenstein was a part of the Tantric cult, an Indian religious philosophy. It appears that these erotic sculptures had the support of the traditional practices of centuries of temple building. Godwin Austen refers to a temple in Numaligarh where, beside humans, animals were depicted in intimate positions. One such illustration is found in the shakti shrine in Sadiya on a terracotta plaque depicting a pair of peacocks. Another frieze from the Shiva temple at Deo Parbat shows a royal archer shooting a deer couple in coital position. According to T. N. Ramachandran, this scene depicts the story of Pandu, father of Panadavas from Mahabharata, who was cursed to die if he engaged in physical intimacy, for shooting a deer couple (who were actually a sage and his wife in disguise of deer) in coital position.

Dancing Figures

Another set of sculptures that formed an integral part of temple architecture, is the dancing figures. Since earliest times, dance has been associated with various ceremonial functions in temples. It is, therefore, not surprising that dancing figures decorate the walls of temples. The earliest dancing scene has been recovered from a slab in Tezpur. The slab is divided into a number of sunken panels by means of circular pilasters, each containing a male or female, or two females, or two males. On the right, we find a man

NOTES

fighting with a lion, a male playing a flute and a female dancing by his side, one male playing a pipe, a male playing a drum and a female dancing, a man playing on cymbals and a woman dancing, a man playing lyre and another dancing to his right, a male playing a drum and another dancing to his left. An interesting and complicated dancing figure of the time is recovered from the Deo Parbat ruins. Here, there is a representation of a god and goddess on a shikara foliage both dancing with their legs resting on elephants, which in turn is supported by lotuses. Both the god and goddess have four hands, holding a bow, arrow, rosary and sword (staff) in each hand, with perforated *patra-kundala* in the ears and a *kirti-mukuta* on the head with a frontal tiara.

Besides dancing figures in groups, independent figures are also represented in different dance poses. A sculpture figure of male from Kamakhya (800 A.D.) has been carved in precise geometric angles, gracefully portraying the curve of the body. The head is inclined towards the right shoulder, the left arm which is stretched upwards in a straight line. In spite of the mutilated face, the figure looks remarkable for the elegance of the pose.

Scenes from Epics

The temple walls were generally decorated with sculptures depicting various scenes from the epics. We have already discussed about a frieze, from the Deo Parbat ruins, which depicts the story of Pandu from Mahabharata. Another frieze from the same ruins, having panels, shows Rama and Laksmana seated with the latter behind the former, while Sugriva is kneeling before Rama in supplication; Hanumana and another monkey are watching the scene with reverence. The scene is a depiction of the incident from Ramayana, where Hamumana succeeded in securing the friendship of Rama for the protection of Sugriva. Another frieze from the same place represents a well-known scene from the Mahabharata, namely the *Garuda- garvabhanga*, or the extermination of Garuda's pride.

The portrayal of contemporary life holds more importance than the mythological representations.A study of the various scenes inspired from contemporary life represented in the panels of the temple walls may give us some glimpse into the domestic and social life led by the people of the period. We will refer only to a few representations. The earliest carvings recovered from the Kamakhaya temple, possibly dates back to the seventh century AD. Among many other panels on west gateway of the temple is a house-holder doing his daily worship, while his wife is breast-feeding her child. This portrait of a 'mother and child' is very lively. On another frieze, there are two other carvings— one shows a woman worshipper kneeling and pouring water from a spouted vessel into the mouth of an animal and the other is the profile of a conch-blower with an *usnisa* on the head, the cheeks bulging out as in the act of blowing the conch. Another frieze from Deo Parbat belonging to the tenth century AD. consists of three panels, illustrating— (i) a woman inside a toilet, (ii) a man dragging a woman while another is about to thrash her. In the same scene, another woman is dissuading him while a man is advancing with a raised mace. A second frieze from the same place, which is divided into four panels, depicts the following scenes from left to right: (a) an ascetic pushing a gat before him, (b) another ascetic dancing with *sula* and *dhakka* in his hands and a *kamandala* hangs from his right arm, and (c) a woman, in an ecstatic mood, in a sitting position. Yet another frieze divided into two big panels illustrates a combat between two warriors. The actual combat is shown in one panel, while in the other, the triumphant warrior marches off holding the severed head of his opponent, the headless trunk staggering behind.

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5.4.1 Sculpture of Animals

The animal carvings which adorn the walls and ceilings of temples may broadly be classified under three groups— animals studied from the point of view of nature, animals representing symbolism, grotesque animals.

One of the most common animals used are elephants, and they were carved and chiseled with great skill. It has been pointed out that the elephant-head was used as a royal seal in Assam. In many temples, a row of elephants, *gajathara* appear as a basement moulding. On a moulding in the Hajo temple, about two feet above the plinth a row of caparisoned elephants in high relief encircles the building and appears to support the edifice. The elephants, face outwards, standing tall at sixteen feet; are finely designed showing only their tusks, trunks and front legs. In the midst of ruins of an eleventh century Shiva temple at Deo Parbat, fragments of sandstone with elegantly sculptured elephant supporting the superstructures of a temple are also found.

The lion was represented conventionally in Assam. Stone slabs bearing huge lions standing couchant over vanquished elephants are seen in the ruins of Tezpur and Gachtal. Lying among the ruins at Bamuni Hill, two large stones with 'lion on elephant motif' resemble the work from the Pala period of Bengal. The representation of a pair of lions shown running into each other with their heads bent towards the *kalasa* (auspicious jar) are a very common decorative motif in early Assamese art.

On the west side of the Kamakhaya temple, is a modern shrine, known as Ghantaskarna, into whose basement stone fragments of older temples have been built. One of these fragments has been described by K. N. Dikshit, 'It is a beautifully carved frieze in which the band represents a series of garlands and in the lower scroll-work there are some spirited representations of animals. Only four animal figures of these series, viz. a buffalo, a deer, a lion and a tiger are extant; but the quality of art manifested in them is unsurpassed in Assam.'

The bull as *vahana* of Shiva is a specimen belonging to an early period; birds are rarely used represented in the sculptures exception being geese and peacocks. The most beautiful figure of a pair of peacocks is seen on the terracotta plaque. The flying geese on the door-jamb, at Deo Parbat, with their long necks stretched forward are remarkably well-known for their naturalness of pose.

In Hindu plastic art, animal symbolism has been greatly used. According to the religious texts, various animals symbolize different gods and goddesses. The animals that were used as symbols were always portrayed conventionally, for it was always pleasant to encounter animals whose real habits were familiar to people; sculptors did not hesitate to follow the texts and traditions in order to make their work look symbolical rather than real. For this very reason, symbolical figures, very quickly became grotesque or mythical figures with the *kirtimukha* (glory-face) becoming very common. The motif, however, occurs throughout the whole history of Indian art, first as a sacred symbol, then as a mere artistic device, and later as an architectural sign then as representing whole history of Indian art. The origin of the *kirtimukha* is narrated in a legend in *Skanda Purana*. The *kirtimukha* is a very ancient motif, and is also found in China under the name of Tao's Tieh, 'Monster face', and in the Far-east under Banaspati, meaning 'king of woods'. Subsequently, it was introduced in Hindu art, and interpreted under Brahmanical influence as a terrible emanating from Shiva and becoming *kirtikumkha* in the process. In the rendering of this skull motif in the hands of the Indian artists, a commingling took place with the head of the elfin, king of beasts. The *kirtimukha* figures were illustrated in the early temples of the province. They were to be found

NOTES

everywhere on walls, basement, pillars, and on door-lintels above entrances. In Assam, the motif had undergone various types of stylization with a profusion of decorative elements. In most of the figures in Assam, the lower jaw is absent, which reminds us of their close affinity to the *khmer* motif of Java. The *kirtimukha* found at Deo Parvat are remarkably akin to the Javanese figures and, like the latter, have eyes with horn-like sockets. Figures of *makara* whose mouth resembles that of an alligator with a tail, *suparna*, the mythical deity, half-man and half-bird and *Garuda* are generally found in temple architecture.

5.4.2 Sculptural Designs

It has previously been indicated that the ordinances of the *Silpa sastras* which claimed sanctity next to the Veda itself, influenced the artists and left little room for imagination in the representations of divine and semi-divine figures. However, ornamentation, a major branch of an art, was left entirely to their fancy; and here they found an opportunity of giving vent to their artistic side leading to the development of an endless variety of decorative designs. These decorative designs may conveniently be grouped under three classes— architectural, geometric and floral.

The cavity window ornament generally marked by the hollow portion of a temple wall, may be called an architectural design. The caitya –windows of two different types are seen on a lintel at Dah Parbatiya, which belonged to the sixth centuryA. D. One of these patterns is a trefoil in which all three arcs are on the sides. The interior of the sunken panels is entirely covered with geometrical patterns with a half rosette in the centre. Slabs bearing similar designs, carved around a decorative figure, for which the figure looks as if enshrined within a pyramidal temple, are discovered throughout the province. *Gavaksa* type, (circular window) perforated window and Sahara are other favourite architectural designs.

Geometrical designs are found on ceilings of shrines as well as on pillars. In his sketch of a ceiling decoration of an early temple at Tezpur, Dalton has shown the techniques of this type of decoration, which is fashioned mainly by carving circles within circles. Various geometrical designs are seen in the Dimapur and Kachamari pillars.

The artist, combined with a considerable amount of faithful representation and integrity, delineates a luxuriance amount of decoration and picturesque arrangement. As floral ornaments could be used for any decorative purpose and any vacant space could be filled up with such devices, naturally, they became varied in form and number. Of the floral designs, lotus was most popular. And it was carved in various forms— in bud, in a half-open state, and in full-blown flowers. Pedestals of statues and footstools for gods and goddesses are often formed of large multi-petal led lotus (*padmdsana*). Even ceilings of shrines bore the carving of *visvapadma*. An illustration from Dah Parvatiya represents a cluster of lotuses in full bloom from a pond.

A beautifully carved slab in Cole Park, Tezpur, bears three scrolls. The extreme left scroll encloses animals of various kinds such as swan, horse, and hog; the other two scrolls are without any foliage. A splendid floral example is the trefoil arc from Tezpur. Besides the *kirtimukha* at the top and a rosette in the centre, it bears several meandering creepers, which are well marked for their diversity in style and arrangement.

5.4.3 Iconography in Assamese Art

The worship of deities in this iconographic form goes back to an early period in India. Whatever be the antiquity, iconism was prevalent; even after the introduction of image

NOTES

worship the deities were represented in their symbols, for instance, the footprint and tree representing the Buddha, *linga* and *yoni* representing Shiva and a *Devi* respectively. In Assam, both these representations are found, and the earliest evidence of icons is found in the ruins of Dah Parvatia and other places dating around 5th century C.E.

Ancient Indian texts mention icons of various deities in their different poses and mudras and the specimens from Assam are found in almost all these varieties. Most deities are found with more than their usual number of heads and hands. This is, however, not inartistic as explained by many art critics but indicated the symbolic nature and attributes of deities and the same symbolism lies in the weapons or articles held in their hands.

5.4.4 Images at Deopani

Assam was the centre of Shakti worship, and various forms of Shaktism were prevalent in the province during different periods of history. Hence, there evolved a variety of *Devi* images associated with different Sakti cults.One of the early discovery of Devi images is the Deopani image of Durga mentioned by Bloch in his Annual Report in 1905. It is a large four-armed figure (5 feet 10 inches high). The goddess has four hands; the two lower arms are in *varadd-mudri* position. Of the two upper ones, the right hand holds a trident and the left one a mirror. On each side of the goddesses, stands a small worshipping female, holding the hands with palms joined together in front of the breast, the usual gesture of supplication. Above these are small figures of Ganesa and Kartikeya. Figures of Parvati are found on many temple walls. A fine sculpture discovered in a private residence at Gauhati is that of Parvati with a sword in her right hand a mirror in her left.

The most common image of Devi is *Mahisamardini*. In most of the Devi temples erected during the Ahom rule, the goddess is worshipped in this popular iconic form. A large figure of *Mahisamardini* is seen in the idol of the Hatimura temple, Nowgong. The goddess has a slender waist, broad breasts; her right foot is placed on the lion, pressing the shoulder of the demon, whose shape resembles a buffalo with her left. She pierces the trident into the body of the demon, and has fastened his arm with a noose. To put her weight on the *Asura* (demon), the goddesses is slightly bent to the left. The lion is also shown attacking the demon.

Another fierce form of the Devi, popular among a certain sect of the Tantric worshippers, is *Chamunda*. She looks fearful with protruding teeth, long tongue, erect hair, emaciated body, sunken eyes, and withered belly. Her pedestal is carved with ghosts, riding on whose shoulders she roams the earth. She holds a trident in one hand, and a skull or a cup in the other. Another figure of *Chamunda* has been discovered from Nabhanga, Nowgon. The image is terrible to look at, the appearance is grim, bones of the chest are exposed, the eyes are sunken into their sockets, the abdomen is shriveled and the mouth is agape. Human skulls are laced round the matted hair-lock, waist and neck. The goddess is seated on a corpse, on the right side is a vulture and on the left is a jackal. Further below are a skull and a few bones. This figure is remarkable and is considered to be rare.

Shiva Images

Unfortunately, a sufficient number of Shiva images have not been found. One of the reasons for the paucity of Shiva images is that the central object of worship in a Shaiva temple is invariably the phallic emblem or the *linga*.

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The earliest representation of Shiva is seen on the panel of the Sun temple at Tezpur. This is a two handed image of the *Isana* aspect of Shiva standing in the *samapadasthanaka* pose, with an attendant on each of the side niches. A sandstone image of Shiva, identified by P.D. Chaudhary; where the image is on a full-blown lotus in the *vajrasna* pose. It has ten arms and five heads, the faces of four of which alone are visible. Nandi is represented below shiva.

The image of *Uma-Mahesvara* represents a type of composite Shiva. This form of Shiva is particularly associated with some form of Tantric worship where worshippers are to concentrate on the Devi who is sitting on the lap of Shiva in the *mahapadmavana.* The Shiva is seated on the right with his right leg in a pendent position. It appears that Shiva is four-armed, though two arms are not visible. One right hand embraces the chin of Uma and the other holds a trident. His hair is dressed in a high loop (*jata-mukuta*) and on his ears, he wears *patra-kundala*. Uma is seated by Shiva's side, in a corresponding position with her left leg in a pendent position. Another image of *Uma-Maheswara* is found among the ruins of Badaganga in Nowgong district. The image is richly decorated and the hair of Uma is dressed in a peculiar way. Her hair is tied upwards into a thin knot and then flattened at the top and tied round like a big ball.

One of the excellent *nrityamurtis* of Shiva was found near Gauhati, on the bank of river Brahmaputra and is now a part of the collection in the Assam Provincial Museum. The image is carved on big stone with a circular border having floral designs. Shiva, as *Nataraja,* is dancing on his bull. The face is mutilated; the figure appears to have ten hands. Such a dancing figure of Shiva with ten hands closely follows the description given in the *Matsya Purana*, which lays down that the *khadga*, *shakti*, *danda* and *trestle* should be placed in the right hand, one of the two remaining hands in the *veranda* pose and the other holding a rosary. In this image, the left hand of Shiva rests on Nandi and the right is raised in a dancing gesture. The bull has a *ghanta* hanging from the neck.

Another early type of *Natraja* with six hands was recovered from the ruins in Bamuni Hill. A four-armed image of Shiva as Tripurari in a dancing pose was found at Deo-Parbat. The image holds bow and arrow in its two main hands. A tiara is seen on the head while circular patra-kundalas adorn the ears.

An interesting figure of Shiva as *Lakulisa* is found carved on a chaitya window in the ruins of Dah Parbatita, Tezpur. *Lakulisa* is usually represented as seated in *padmasana,* holding a *mastulinga* (citron fruit) in the right hand and a staff in the left hand. A female holding a cup stands to his left while another stands to his right.

The composite image of Shiva-Vishnu (*Harihara*), which suggests the cordial relation between the Shiva and Vishnu cults from North Gauhati, is a unique piece of sculpture. The figure has two attendants an on each side. The right part of the deity has the emblem of Shiva namely the *trisula* and the *damara.* The left side represents Vishnu with his *karanda-mukuta* lavishly ornamented.

In his terrible avatar, Shiva is usually known as *Bhairava*. In this image, he has a grim face with open teeth, a pot- belly, a garland of skulls and serpents as ornaments. He has plaited hair and several hands. The four arm image of *Bhairava* is represented without garments, with a flabby belly, long skull and garland and flames issuing out of his head. He is standing on a prostrated body. All these attributes give him a ferocious look for which he is worshipped by a sect of devoted followers known as *Aghora-panthi*.

So far we have been discussing the various forms of Shiva whipped by the devotees. But sculptural representations illustrating some mythological episodes associated

NOTES

with Shiva have been discovered. One sculpture depicts the story of Shiva killing the demon *Andhakasura*. *Andhakasura,* by his penance, obtained several boons from Brahma; as a result of which he became very powerful and harassed the gods. The gods requested Shiva to save them; thereupon a fight took place between Shiva and *Andhakasura* and wounded him with his *trisula*. But each drop of blood that fell from the body of the demon assumed a new shape, thus, there arose a thousand of Andhakasuras to fight against Shiva. Shiva, realizing this, immediately thrust his *trisula* into the body of real Andhakasura, and held a skull to collect the blood flowing down the demon's body. The whole theme is well illustrated in the image. Here, Shiva is shown with fur hands, in two of which he bears a *trisula,* the end of which is pinned into the body of Andhakasura, the left lower hand holds the *kapala*. The third eye is prominent.

The and images of Ganesa and Kartika, both these gods are intimately associated with Shiva, and are to be discussed along with the Shiva icons. Though a son of Shiva and a member of the Shaiva group of deities, Ganesa has almost become a non-sectarian and all sects agree in honouring him as 'the bestower of success' (*siddhidata)* and 'the remover of obstacles' (*vighnesvara*).

It is one of the reasons why his figure stands over the doors of house and on niches and entrances of temples. He is also considered to be the guardian deity of the village, and as such, his image is installed in one of the four quarters in almost every village. Many rock-cut figures of Ganesa are to seen on the banks of the Brahmaputra, particularly near the bathing ghats.

There are various types of Ganesa images such as those in seated, standing and dancing position. In most cases, the god is usually sculptured as four-handed, holding in his hands a lotus, his own tusk, a battle-axe and ball of rice-cake and having three eyes. The figure of Ganesa carved in a shallow niche at Vasundhari, Nowgong district is interesting. On the top is a *kirtimukha* with a pearl necklace issuing out of its mouth. The head of the god is adorned with a matted hair dress (*jata-juta*), he has lotus buds adorning his ears as ornaments, and holds) in his hands a blue lotus (*utpala*), axe, rosary and eatables, the last is his trunk. The mouse, his *vahana* is placed near his foot. The dancing Ganesa is a fairly popular theme in the eastern Indian school of architecture. The figure of the four-armed Ganesa, on the wall of the Kamakhya temple, dancing on his rat, which looks up to the god, is a well-known and popular representation of the deity.

Kumara or karthikeya is another son of Shiva. Being brought up by the six mothers, the *Krittikas,* he is called Karthikeya. He is also regarded as a guardian deity, and an annual festival, Kartika Puja, is celebrated in his honour both in Assam and Bengal. However, images of the god are rare. His images which have been discovered show him on his usual *vahana, mayura* (peacock) and holding a bow in his hands.

Representation of Brahma

Although he was a member of the Hindu Trinity, no independent religious cult dedicated to Brahma evolved and no temple was set up exclusively for his worship. Nevertheless, images of Brahma adorn the walls, ceilings and niches of many Saivite and Vaisnavite temples. In a preserved image, Brahma is shown with eight hands. Here Brahma is seen seated on a *padmasana* in a yogic posture. A swan below the seat is shown paying him homage. The palm of one of the lower left hands is raised in paying homage. The palm of the one of the lower hands exhibits the *varada mudra* pose, while in one hand he holds the sacrificed ladle and in the other hand he holds the sacrificial spoon. The panel

NOTES

from the Sun temple, Tezpur, also bears a standing figure of Brahma with an attendant on each side. He has long beard and wears a long conical cap.

In another image, Brahma is seen standing on a pedestal decorated with lotus buds and a swan. He has *jata-mukuta* and *yajnopavita*. He has four faces, of which three are seen in the icon, and out of four hands the two lower hands are broken. The upper right hand holds a *sruka* and the left a *sruva*. On both sides of the images stand two female figures, and at the top there is *kirtimukha*. On the two sides, flying *vidyayadharas* are also seen.

Image of Surya

In this province, the Surya cult was prevalent. From *Markandaya Purana,* we come to know that Surya was worshipped not only for attainment of welfare and desire, but also for removal of diseases. Several images of Surya have been unearthed from different parts of the province. The earliest of these images has been discovered from the ruins of the Surya Temple at Tezpur. The central panel of an enormous lintel at Tezpur is occupied by a figure of Surya with two attendants; the icon may possibly date back to 8th century A.D.

This figure presents more or less similar features to the *Sukresvara Surya*, Guwahati. The deity is standing and carries a full-blown lotus with stalk in each hand. He has as ornaments *kirita-mukuta, kundalas, haras,* girdle, and *uttariya-vastra* in the form of a long garment. He wears boots, and the sacred thread which is very prominent. But the horse and the chariot are absent. It is, however, not easy to say whether the female figures at his sides should be regarded as his consorts, (*sanga and Chhaya*) or attendants. As per the style, these images date back to 9th century A. D., bearing resemblance to the *Surya* image found in a field near Sundia, in the 24 Parganas district in Bengal. A native carved image of surya was found near Sadiya. Here the deity is seen on a chariot drawn by seven horses.

Vishnu Image

Vishnu appears to be the most popular god of the Hindus. Vishnu, in his various forms, is not only worshipped in temples especially set up for him, but also finds an important place even in the Shaiva and Shakti shrines. The four-handed *sthanaka* image of Vishnu is most common among those discovered in the province. As a cult image, it carries in its hands *sankha, Chakra, gada* and *padma*. These images of Vishnu are differentiated into twenty-four forms in varying order in which the four hands hold these four attributes.

The earliest image of Vishnu was the standing sculpture at Deopani. The pedestal inscription tells that it is an image of Narayana on plaegraphic ground as well as in consideration of its execution it belongs to ninth century C. E. The expressions are characteristic of the late Gupta sculpture. The right hand and feet of the image are broken, and the halo behind the head is lost. The upper left hand holds the conch and the lower left holds the mace. Vishnu has all the usual ornaments—*kaustubha* and *srivatsa* symbols, *yajnopavita,* and *vanamala* reaching to the knees. Another Vishnu image of the period is the mutilated standing figure in black basal. In the back right hand it holds the *gada,* the back left hand the *chakra* and in the front right and left hands the *padma* and *sankha* repectively. Vishnu carrying attributes in this manner is considered to be a special form of *trivikrama*.

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Fig. 5.2 *Vishnu Sculpture at Deopani*

A standing Vishnu in the *samabhanga* pose is noticed among the ruins of Gosain-Juti, Nowgong district. The image wears a high *kirita-mukuta* on the head, flattened *patra-kundalas* in the ears, and two necklaces one with the *kastubha* pendant attached on the neck. The upper hands are missing, as also the lower left hand; while the lower right is in the *varada* pose holding a lotus.The *vanamala* is arranged in the same way as the image at Deopani, both in decorative arrangement and facial type. Sri and Saraswati stand on *tribhanga*, the former to the right hand and the latter to his left; both wearing conical *kirita mukutas*, flattened *patra-kundalas*, a single necklace with pendant between the breasts, *angadas* and wristlets. Sri holds rosaries in her hands while Saraswati indicates *abhaya* or protection with her right hand and holds a lyre in her left hand. Another fragmentary sculpture of standing Vishnu is seen in the same ruin. The figure has a halo with a dentil edge which bears a carving of a hovering *vidyadhara* with scarf held in hands in the ethereal region indicated by a circle with indented edges as in the Pala sculptures of Bengal.

The standing bronze figure of Vishnu, originally hailing from Dibrugarh is of unique iconographic interest. The image is peculiar in that there is no object held in any of the four hands, all of which are in the *tribhanga* pose and *kartari-mudra* (the way in which the index and little fingers point outwards and the middle and ring fingers are tucked in); the throne on which the god stands has parrots at four corners. The deity wears a close fitting loin cloth, crocodile shaped ear-ornaments (*makara-kundala*), *mukuta* and sandals. Of the two female attendants, the one on the right holds a bud and a dragger and the one of the left has her hands in a peculiar dancing mode. Probably the former was intended to represent Lakshmi and the latter Saraswati. But the absence of any other regular attributes of Vishnu makes it difficult to identify.

The *asana* and *sayana* images of Vishnu are also not rare. The black basalt partially damaged composite figure of Vishnu in the *yogasana* pose is an excellent piece of sculpture and is perhaps the only known specimen of the time and the only one known specimen of a particular type of *yogasana*-murti of Vishnu. According to the text, in the *yogasana* pose, Vishnu is seated on a padmasana with four hands and a *karranda-mukuta* on the head. The front hands of the image are in *yoga-mudra* and the eyes are slightly closed. The hands of the figure are damaged so it is not possible to

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ascertain what attributes they have. But in other aspects the icon conforms to the description of Vishnu in the *yogasana* pose mentioned in the texts. The image surrounded by a *prabhamandala* with flaming rays which resemble creepers or ornamentation proceeding outwards. Outside the *prabhamandala*, on the four corners are the figures of *avarana devatas*, namely, *Mahisamardini*, kartikeya Ganesa and a cross-legged *pususa*. *Garuda* is seen sculptured below the *padmasana*. The presence of Ganesa and *Mahisamardini* on the right leads to the inference that the idea was to depict Vishnu at the centre surrounded by five gods.

The rock cut sculpture on the cliff on the banks of Brahmaputra behind the Sukresvara temple, Guwahati with Vishnu as the central figure, deserve special mention. This image is known as *Vishnu Janardana,* though the disposition of the attributes in the hands indicated that the *Narayana* form of the image was intended. The deity is represented here seated crossed-legged in *vajra-paryanka mudra* position. The image of surya and Ganesa to the right and the figures of Shiva in ascetic form and the ten-handed Durga to the left form a *panchayatana* with Vishnu as the central image. The sculpture carved on rocks at Urbasi Island, Gauhati show that the worshippers followed all the principal Hindu gods, as we find representations of Surya, Ganesa, Shiva and Devi pose on a *padmasana* with four hands; the upper hands hold a conch and the lower right hand in *upadesic mudra* while the lower left hand holds a rosary; ring like *kundalas* adorn his ears.

Images of different incarnations of Vishnu have been discovered from various parts of the province. The figures of avataras are the usually depicted on stone slabs decorating the walls of temples. Among these independent figures, the commonly found ones are of *Varaha* and *Narasimha*. The best specimen is the *Bhu- varaha* incarnation. In this figure, Vishnu has the face of a boar and the body of man. The boar face is slightly raised up; the right leg is bent a little, and probably made to rest on the head of the serpent *Adisesa*.

Fig. 5.3 *Vishnu in Yogasana Pose*

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Kamakhya Temple- A study

The Kamakhya temple is one of the main *pithas* (sacred place) among fifty one *Shaktipithas* and the temple is dedicated to Goddess Kamakhya. Kamakhya is another form of Parvati. The Kamakhya temple is located on the Nilachal hill in western part of Guwahati city in Assam. There is an incomplete stone staircase known as the *Mekhalaujua* path along with the Kamakhya temple. Here, Kamakhya is worshiped in the form of *yoni*, i.e., genitalia. The most popular festival is *Ambubachi*. It is believed that during the festival time, each summer, goddess Kamakhya goes through her menstrual cycle.

A numbers of legends and myths are associated with the Kamakhya temple. Among them, a well-known mythological story is found in the *KalikaPurana*. According to the myth, once Daksha, father of Sati, organized a sacrificial programme where all Gods and Goddesses were invited, but, Shiva and Sati were ignored. Daksha did not like Shiva for his appearance. But, Sati went to the ceremony without invitation. Daksha dishonoured her husband Shiva. This incident was unbearable to Sati. So, she jumped into the fire altar and died.

Sculpture of Kamakhya Temple

Hearing this news, Shiva became furious and destroyed Daksha. Shiva carried the dead body of Sati on his shoulder, roaming around the universe. All the Gods and Goddesses were fearful of the outcome. Finally, Vishnu secretly started to detach the body of Sati into fifty one pieces with his *Chakra* (wheel). Whereever the pieces of Sati's body fell, every place turned into *shakti pitha*. It is believed that the *yoni* part of Sati had fallen down on the top of the Nilachala hill, hence, it is known as Kamakhya *pitha*. *KalikaPurana* mentioned that the *yoni* part of Sati existed in the form of a stone in the Kamakhya. The *KalikaPurana* also describes that the mountain Nilachala represented the body of Shiva himself and when *yoni* of Sati had fallen on the mountain, it turned blue. There is also a mythological belief that Kamakhya came to this place secretly to fulfill sexual enjoyment (*kama*) with her husband Shiva. It is to be noted that the sanctum of the temple looks like a natural cave which is a dark and mysterious chamber. There is no image inside the sanctum, but a sculptured image of stone which resembles a *yoni* and interestingly, a natural spring keeps the image moist throughout the year.

It is difficult to find out the history of origin of the temple. But, it is believed that the temple was built around the 4th -5th century C.E. There was a traditional belief that Kalapahar (a Muslim iconoclast from Bengal) destroyed the original form of the Kamakhya temple. But, there is no authentic evidence regarding this. The temple is well-known for its sculpture and art. According to an inscription on the Kamakhya temple, Koch king, Naranarayana reconstructed the temple over the ruins of the old structure in 1565 A.D. Please note that the original structure of the temple is reconstructed many times; hence, the sculptural compositions of this temple reflect the characteristic style of different periods. Some of the stone carvings display the characteristic styles Gupta art as well as art of Orissa.

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Sculptures of Assam are closely associated with the architectural style of Bengal and Orissa. The sculptures of Assam are included under the fourth school of Indian art representing Bengal, Orissa and Assam due to the similarities in their style.

The temple essentially follows the north Indian style of architecture. The sculptures are mostly found on the exterior as well as on the interior walls of the temple. A good number of sculptures also exist on the temple gates. Besides, some sculptures lay scattered within the temple campus.

The walls of the temple are richly embellished with the numerous relief sculptures where diverse subject matters such as religious, secular, flora and fauna and geometrical design are depicted.

A great number of exquisite figures of divine images which follow the iconographic rules are inscribed on the outer walls of the sanctum. Mostly, the life-size divine figures of male are installed on the outer temple walls. An important aspect is that the images are depicted in poses and gestures which are emotionally expressive. Shiva, in his various forms, has been depicted. Most of the figures of Shiva found are in his *Bhairava* form. Due to the influence of *Tantricism*, the images of Gods and Goddesses are represented in their destructive forms. According to *Agamas*, twenty five sporting forms (*lila-murtis*) of Shiva are found in the sculptural representations and most of them are usually illustrated in the South Indian temples. According to *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, *Bhairava* appears with flabby belly, round yellow eyes, side-tusks and wide nostrils, and adorns a garland of skulls. He adorns snakes as ornaments with other some ornaments. The complexion of Bhairava is as dark as the rain-cloud and his garment is made from the elephant's skin. The image carries several weapons.

In the temple, an image of Shiva is inscribed on the outer wall of the sanctum. The image has four-hands where the emblems are the *trisula* (trident), *khatvanga* (club of bone with skulls), *kati-hastamudra* (one hand is half-raised at ease and kept on the hip), *jnana-mudra* (knowledge comes from within). The God is fully ornamented with different ornaments. A particularly interesting sculpture of Shiva in the form of *Bhairava* is found on the same wall. Here, the image has a terrible face with protruding teeth. His emblems are the sword, skull, *kati-hastamudra* and an indistinct object. According to mythology, the skull which God holds was of the gate-keeper of Vishnu. An interesting feature is that the *Bhairava* images which are found on the wall of the temple, all have different attributes. Interestingly, another image of Shiva expresses his terrifying form through his dancing posture. Considering as a great master of dance and music, the image of Shiva is carved in the form of *Vinadhara Dakshinamurti* where Shiva holds a *vina* in his hands.The head of the dancing *VinadharaDakshinamurti* is unfortunately mutilated but superior craftsmanship can be seen in the physical form. Both the lower hands hold the *vina* while the upper right hand holds the *sruka* (sacrificial spoon). The back left hand carries an indistinct object. Interestingly, the image adorns a *mundamala* (garland of skulls) and is standing on a dead man.These images are carved in realistic manner with the accurate physical details. These images can be regarded to be the best products of sculptural art of Assam. The figures are amalgamated with different characteristic features such as charm, elegant posture, spiritual expression, and simplicity. Besides the *Bhairava* figures, there are also enshrined some other divine images like Surya, Ganesa, and Daksha.

Along with the divine male figures, two female Goddesses are depicted on the exterior wall of the sanctum.The females are identified as the form of *Shakti* namely Gauri and Uma. Nature is the symbolic representation of woman who has creative power. According to Indian mythology, Gauri is the wife of Shiva and Uma is another form of Gauri. Here, in the sculptural representation, Gauri is standing in a graceful posture and holding a half bloomed lotus in the right hand while the other performs the *kati- hastamudra*. The figure reflects the characteristic feature of the Gupta art. According to the treatise, the image of Gauri has been

depicted like an unmarried girl. Uma is also almost similar to Gauri but the figure is holding a mirror which is the special emblem of Uma. Therefore, the figure produces the *Shringar rasa* (erotic sentiment). The sculptures depict some human characters like subtle human moods and sentiments. Artists have shown sensitivity while carving the female sculptures. Therefore, the images become more life-like on the stone surfaces. Some other mutilated stone blocks represent female divine beauty. These sculptural pieces are also influenced by the Gupta style. The female figures are very sensuously carved. Proportionately the figures are well carved out where the physical beauty of the female is transferred into spiritual beauty. A unique representation of female is shown in meditation posture. The treatment of the carving of the figure is similar to that of Indian terracotta style. Another image of woman is exposing openly her genital organ. This type of figure is carved on the temple wall and it is due to the influence of *Tantricism*.

The secular themes which are taken from everyday life are depicted in the temple art as well. A sculptural composition is found on the gate of the temple which is that of a mother and child. The woman is engaged in suckling her child in seated posture. Some other important scenes display where a female is engaged in supplying water to a male who is thirsty. Another scene represents a robust male who is eating something. A very uncommon scene in representation is inscribed on the temple wall. In this scene, a man is carrying a heavy load over his head. Some stone blocks are illustrated with representations of dance posture and erotic posture which are found within the temple campus.

Flowers and animals are important parts of the decoration of temple architecture. These are used in the temple building for auspiciousness as well as for the beautification of the temple. The depictions of the floral motif in the temple can be considered as important part of the ornamentation. Mostly, the floral motifs are carved on the outer walls of the sanctum of the temple. Lotus is considered to be the most sacred flower in Hinduism and signified the emblem of beauty. Lotus is given as a pedestal to most of the Gods and Goddesses in this temple. Different kinds of floral motifs are depicted as geometric designs. A carved stone block which is found within the temple campus represents the creeper motif in interlacing pattern.

In this temple, lion is given a significant place. For instance, a broken door sill depicts a *mangalakalasa*, which is flanked by two lions running in opposite directions with raised tails and their heads bent towards the *mangalakalasa* are commonly depicted. Apart from this, a motif of *gaja-simha* is found on the temple wall. In this motif, a huge lion is seated vertically on his back legs on an elephant which is smaller in size. Such sculptural expression is also displayed in the Orissa temples. Another stone block shows two lions joined by one lion head which are fixed on the upper part of the temple. *Kamakhaya Temple*

Kamakhaya Temple

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Check Your Progress

8. Mention the three groups into which the sculptures of Assam are divided.
9. Classify the sculpture of human forms into two groups.
10. Which is the most common image of Devi found in Assam?
11. Where do we find the earliest representation of Shiva in Assam?
12. Where do we find the earliest image of Vishnu in Assam?

5.5 SUMMING UP

NOTES

- In ancient times, Assam was known as Pragjyotisa.
- The legendary account of Assam is described in a Sanskrit text, Hargaurisamvada.
- The historical account of Assam starts with the establishment of Varman dynasty. Pushya Varman founded Kamarupa kingdom in 4th century.
- Three dynasties flourished in the Pre-Ahom period. These are Varman, Salastambha and Pala dynasties.
- The Tais, who later came to be known as Ahoms, entered the Brahmaputra valley in the beginning of 13th century from upper Burma region.
- The existence of numerous shrines dedicated to Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, goddess and other deities is attested by both inscriptions as well as contemporary literature.
- The architectural style in Assam was very much influenced by the Gupta style of art and architecture.
- The Assamese temple art and sculpture is a reflection of broad aspects such as myth, customs, mythology, beliefs, and cults which are aesthetically reflected through the sculptural motifs found in symbolic representations.
- We find an earlier reference to a Sun temple in Kamarupa in the Markandeya Purana.
- The temple ruins at Dah Parvati are one of the earliest specimens of architectural and stone carving in Assam belonging to the 5th-6th century A.D.
- The Pala Empire was among the most famous kingdoms of India that existed from AD 750–1174.
- The best aspect to the Pala Empire was its excellence in art and sculptures. They were responsible for creating a unique form of Buddhist art called the 'Pala School of Sculptural Art'. The enormous structures of Vikramshila Vihara, Odantapuri Vihara, and Jagaddala Vihara were classic illustrations of their architectural brilliance.
- The Sena empire ruled Bengal in the 11th and 12th centuries. The dynasty was founded by Hemanta Sen .
- The sculptures of this province may be divided into three groups—sculpture of human forms, sculpture of animal forms and sculptural designs.
- The sculpture of human forms can be further classified into—representation of gods and goddesses, representation of human figures.
- The earliest representation of a human figure is found on some terracotta plaques recovered in 1926 from the ruins at Dah Parbatiya.
- The animal carvings which adorn the walls and ceilings of temples may broadly be classified under three groups— animals studied from the point of view of nature, animals representing symbolism, grotesque animals.
- In Assam, both the representations of linga and yoni are found, and the earliest evidence of icons is found in the ruins of Dah Parvatia and other places dating around 5th century C.E.

5.6 KEY TERMS

- **Pragjyotisa**: Its a ancient name of Modern Assam.
- **Shaivite**: A cult related to Lord Shiva.
- **Vaishnavite**: A cult related to Lord Vishnu.

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5.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. In ancient times, Assam was known as Pragjyotisa.
2. The legendary account of Assam is described in a Sanskrit text, Hargaurisamvada.
3. Pushya Varman founded Kamarupa kingdom in 4th century.
4. A Sun temple in Kamarupa has been mentioned in the in the Markandeya Purana.
5. The temple ruins at Dah Parvati are one of the earliest specimens of architectural and stone carving in Assam belonging to the 5^{th}-6^{th} century A.D.
6. The Palas were responsible for creating a unique form of Buddhist art called the Pala School of Sculptural Art.
7. Somapura Mahavihara was built by Dharmapala.
8. The sculptures of this province may be divided into three groups:
   - Sculpture of human forms
   - Sculpture of animal forms
   - Sculptural designs
9. The sculpture of human forms can be further classified into:
   - Representation of gods and goddesses
   - Representation of human figures
10. The most common image of Devi is Mahisamardini.
11. The earliest representation of Shiva is seen on the panel of the Sun temple at Tezpur.
12. The earliest image of Vishnu was the standing sculpture at Deopani.

5.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the images of Yaksha and Yakshani.
2. What is the role of flora and fauna in Assamese art.
3. Write a short note on iconography in Assamese art.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the impact of Gupta art on Assamese art and sculpture.
2. Discuss the evolution of Assamese art.
3. Elaborate on the contributions of the Palas to Indian art and architecture.

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