
UNIT 15 SCULPTURE AND ARCHITECTURE*

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15.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- *stupa* architecture in post-Mauryan period;
- evolution of Buddhist rock-cut architecture;
- temple architecture of the period under study in the context of both cave temples and free-standing temples; and
- various sculptural schools and their chief features.

15.1 INTRODUCTION

This Unit is a survey of art and architecture between the period c.200 BCE-c. 750 CE. It is a vast period that can be divided into three phases: post-Mauryan, Gupta and post-Gupta. Each period was marked by significant contributions to art and architecture. We shall start with the post-Mauryan period: a time of great prosperity. It was marked by refinement of Mauryan architecture whether it is the *stupa* or cave-buildings. Accompanying this was the emergence of three schools of sculpture: Gandhara, Mathura and Amravati. Gupta epoch set new standards in rock cut architecture and sculpture. There was also the first emergence of Hindu cave and structural temples. In post-Gupta era major contributions were made by Pallava and Chalukya dynasties to temple architecture.

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15.2 POST-MAURYAN PHASE (c. 200 BCE-200 CE)

The Mauryan period witnessed production of splendid specimens of art by the state. With the emergence of social groups who could extend substantial patronage for production of specimens of art, new trends in art activities came about. In the post-Mauryan period, patronage by different social groups was the main reason behind the fact that art activities became so widespread all over India and beyond; it was no longer high art exclusively patronized by the state. There was also, from the Mauryan period onwards, a shift toward using non-perishable material i.e. stone as a medium of creative expression. There was also constant interaction in this period with those art forms that flourished beyond the frontiers of the Indian sub-continent. There emerged various schools of art. Let us discuss the main features of post-Mauryan art.

15.2.1 Architecture

Architecture of the post-Mauryan period is mainly in the form of religious buildings. We can divide them into four categories:

- 1) *Stupas*
- 2) Cave architecture for monks of different religions
- 3) Royal Shrines of Kushanas
- 4) Free-standing Sunga pillars.

Stupa

The word *stupa* is derived from the root *stu* which means to worship and praise. In Buddhism it denotes a mound where the relics of the Buddha, his disciples and famous monks are encased.

The Mauryan emperor Ashoka redistributed the Buddha's relics and built several *stupas* enshrining them. Initially, their building plan was very simple. It consisted of a hemispherical mound made of bricks enshrining the relics. Its top had a *chhatra* within a small railing known as *harmika*. The *stupa* was surrounded by a railing known as *vedica*. The space enclosed by it was meant for circumambulation.



The Great *Stupa* at Sanchi, Frontal View of South *Torana*. Credit: Photo Dharma. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:001_Front_View_of_South_Gate_\(32969983444\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:001_Front_View_of_South_Gate_(32969983444).jpg)).

During this period several *stupas* were also enlarged and modified under the patronage of different royal dynasties, traders and artisans. The hemi-spherical dome was enlarged. On this dome an additional terrace *medhi* was built for an additional round of circumambulation. It was provided with a lintel gateway (*torana/toranadvaya*) that was beautifully decorated with reliefs of Buddhist motifs and iconography placed at cardinal positions of the *vedica*. The best preserved examples are located at Bharhut, Bodhgaya, Sanchi and Amravati.



LEFT: *Stupa no. 2, Sanchi*. Credit: Kevin Standage. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sanchi_Stupa_No2.jpg).

RIGHT: *Sanchi Stupa no. 3, Front View*. Credit: Photo Dharma. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:003_Front_View_\(33709016166\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:003_Front_View_(33709016166).jpg)).

Rock Cut Architecture

It involved converting a cave into a building. Artisans were often inspired by contemporary buildings which meant adding elements like pillars (not required in a cave). The oldest cave buildings were excavated under the Mauryas at Barabar and Nagarjuni hills, mainly for the *Ajivika* mendicants. In this period, many caves were excavated in the Western and Eastern Ghats for religious mendicants. Those in the Western Deccan are mainly located in Maharashtra. These were built for Buddhist monks and consisted of two kinds of buildings –

- *caityas* (prayer halls), and
- *viharas* (living quarters).

The *caitya* was generally designed as a large apse-shaped pillared hall. At its centre, a *stupa* (in case of *Hinayana* sect) or an image of the Buddha (in case of *Mahayana* sect) was placed. Its entrance was designed as pillared veranda/porch. The general design of a *vihara* is quite simple. It consisted of a main hall surrounded by small rooms/cells for monks. Its entrance may or may not have a veranda.

The important cave buildings are at Bhaja, Kondane, Pitalhora, Ajanta caves 9 and 10, Bedsa, Nasik, Karli and Kanheri. Some of these contain inscriptions which can be paleographically dated. Others can be dated on the similarity of the architectural styles. Susan Huntington divides these caves into following three sub-phases:

- c.* 100-70 BCE – Bhaja, Kondane, Pitalkhora and Ajanta cave no. 10
- c.* 100-200 CE – Bedsa
- c.* 200-300 CE – Karli and Kanheri

Royal Shrines of Kushanas

The Kushanas adopted certain peculiar customs to consolidate their rule. One such custom was the cult involving the worship of dead rulers; the implication being that any dissent and revolt against the emperor would mean revolt against god. For this purpose special shrines were set up. Two of these have been discovered in Mathura and Surukh Kotal in Afghanistan. The surviving figure in the former is seated and wearing clothes associated with Scythians, high boots and tunic. The throne has lions supporting it, possibly derived from the Mauryan idea of royalty. Its inscription tells us that it was the statue of Vima Kadphises. Another statue discovered is that of Kanishka. This figure is standing. It wears a tunic and boots. He is carrying a sword in right hand and a mace in left. The idea is to give the viewer an impression of his military prowess. Unfortunately, the head of both the statues has not survived.



Headless Statue of Kanishka, Mathura Musuem. Credit: Biswarup Ganguly. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kanishka_enhanced.jpg).

Sunga Pillars

Best specimen of a Sunga pillar is the Heliodorus pillar at Besnagar near Vidisha, Madhya Pradesh. It was commissioned by Heliodorus, Greek ambassador to the Sungas, around 113 BCE. He is one of the earliest recorded Greek converts to Hinduism. The 7-line Brahmi inscription identifies the pillar as *Garuda-dhvaja* installed to showcase his devotion to *Bhagavata* cult. This cult is considered a predecessor of Vishnu cult. The inscription is the first known inscription in India related to Vaishnavism.

In many ways the pillar is different from Mauryan lion-capitals. It is half their size. The shaft does not have a smooth appearance and there is slight decoration in the form of garland and geese motifs. The capital consists of a reverse lotus with its leaves visible. Atop was perhaps a *garuda* sculpture as the name *Garudadhvaja* suggests. The pillar was located near a Vasudeva shrine.



Heliodorus Pillar. Credit: Public. Resource.Org. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Heliodorus_pillar_inscription.jpg).

A banyan tree-shaped capital has also been found. This indicates that many more pillars may have been erected in and around the region of Vidisha but they have not survived.

15.2.2 Sculpture

Sculptural art in this period developed on a large scale. It was largely associated with the decoration of religious buildings. Initial samples belong to the Sungas and their contemporaries. Later on, under the patronage of foreign and Indian rulers there was emergence of three distinct schools:

- 1) Gandhara,
- 2) Mathura, and
- 3) Amravati.

These schools for the first time produced images of the Buddha, Jaina *tirthankaras* and Brahmanical gods which, according to Ananda Coomarswamy, were inspired from *Yaksha* images of the Mauryan period.

Sculpture under the Sungas

The samples dated from 2nd century BCE to 1st century BCE are credited to the Sungas and their contemporaries. They consist of stone sculptures, small terracotta figurines and bas-relief sculptures. Stone sculptures have been recovered from Vidisha, Mathura, Ahichchhatra, Kausambi, Ayodhya, and Pataliputra. They

mainly depict *Yakshas* and *Yakshis*/Yakshinis. Most famous among them is Kubera *Yaksha* from Vidisha wearing a *dhoti*, belt, turban and heavy jewellery.

From the Sunga period onwards relief sculptures became an integral part of *stupa* decoration. Such images are recovered from Sanchi *stupa* 2, Bharhut, Amaravati, and Jaggayyapeta. At Sanchi *stupa* 2 they were carved on the *vedica*. These are mainly floral motifs, elephants, people riding horses etc. Northern entrance of the *stupa* has more significant elements like the Ashokan pillar, *pipal* tree garlanded by *vidyadharas* and *kalpavriksha*. On *vedica* of the Bharhut *stupa* we find carved the serpent king, *yaksha*, *yakshini*, lotus motif, dwarves, people riding horses and even a Greek warrior. Some roundels also have depiction of *Jatakas*. However, the Buddha during this time was never directly depicted. He was represented through symbols like sacred ladder, sacred tree or sacred altar. Amaravati also has reliefs depicting devotees worshiping the Bodhi tree. A relief at Jaggayyapeta in Andhra Pradesh depicts a *chakravartin* (ideal king).

Terracotta images have also been recovered from Chandraketugarh, Mathura, Kaushambi, Ahichchhatra and in Deccan from Kondapur, Nagarjunakonda, Yeleshwaram, Sannati, Ter, Paithan and Nevasa. They are mainly female figurines. There are also few animal figurines which could be toys for children.

Gandhara School of Art

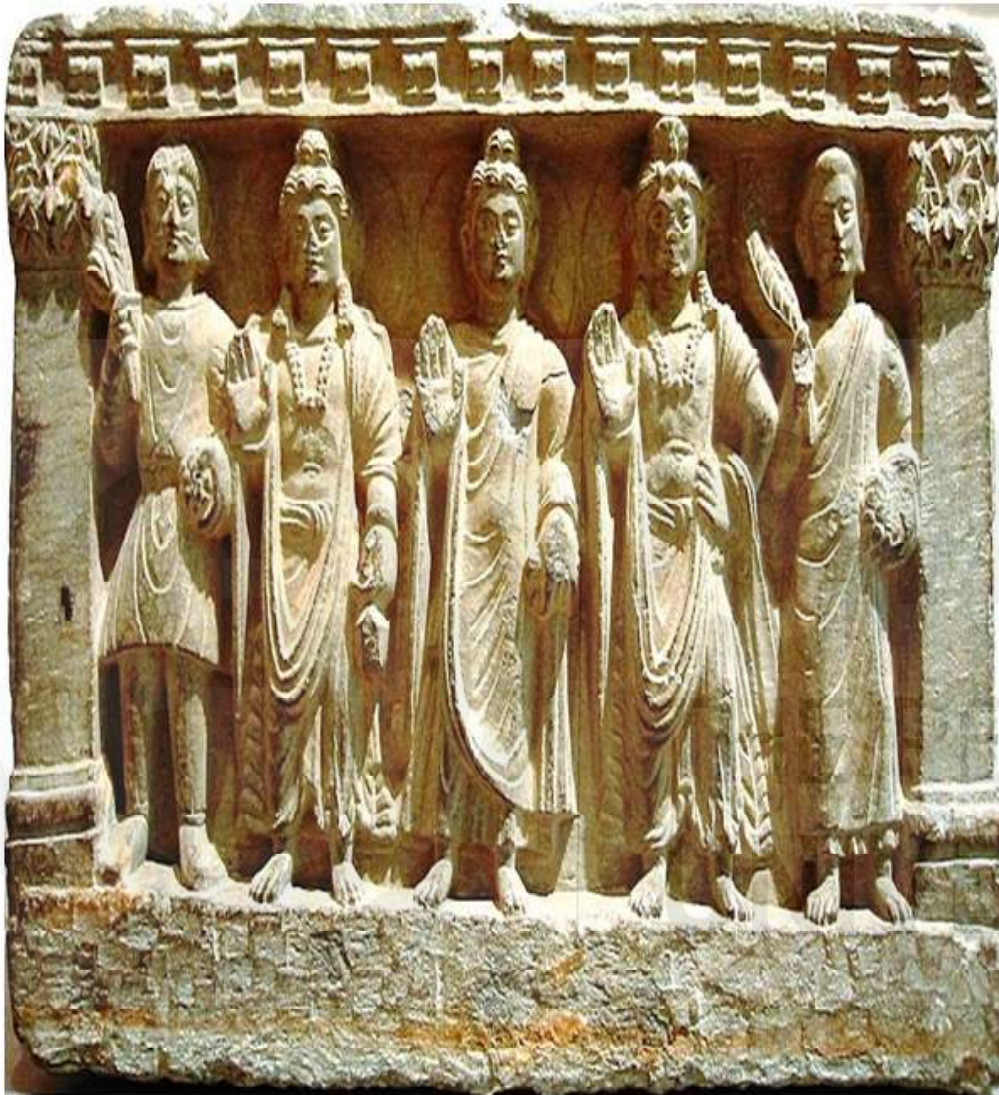
The Gandhara school of art developed in the north-west region of the subcontinent. Various trade routes connecting the subcontinent with the Mediterranean and China passed through this region. Also, in this period it came under the control of various foreign dynasties like Indo-Greeks, Scythians, Parthians and Kushanas. Thus, this school represents an amalgamation of Indian, Greek and West Asian idioms.

The main theme is Buddhism. Several sculptures of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas have been found. The Buddha is depicted in both standing and seated pose. His iconography has both Greek and Indian elements. In the standing pose he wears Greek drapery and



Representation of the Buddha in the Greco-Buddhist art of Gandhara, 1st-2nd Century CE. Piece Preserved in Tokyo National Museum, Japan. Credit: World Imaging, 2004. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhara_Buddha_\(tnm\).jpeg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gandhara_Buddha_(tnm).jpeg)).

stands barefoot. One leg is slightly bent, known as *contrapposto*. He has curly hair and facial features based on the Mediterranean model. Indian element is visible in the poses of hands (*mudras*) such as *abhayamudra*, *dana mudra* etc. He has *mahapurusha-lakshanas* (signs of a great man) like *ushnisha* (three-dimensional oval over the top of the Buddha's head), circular symbol on forehead and plain halo in the background. He does not wear any jewellery. He has elongated ears indicating royal life in previous birth. The sculpture often stands on a pedestal which at times is carved with a scene or auspicious symbol.



An Early Buddhist Triad. From Left to Right: a Kushana Devotee, *Bodhisattva* Maitreya, the Buddha, *Bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara and a Buddhist Monk. 2nd-3rd Century, Gandhara. Credit: No machine-readable uploader provided. World Imaging assumed (based on copyright claims). Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BuddhistTriad.JPG>).

Bodhisattvas (future Buddhas) are also depicted in seated and standing variety. Most of them wear a *dhoti* with shawl covering shoulders. They have elaborate hairstyles and wear heavy jewellery. Different *bodhisattvas* are identified by their *mudra*, head gear or objects they carry. The school also produced several relief sculptures depicting the Buddha's life. This emphasis is in sharp contrast to other Indic schools in which there is emphasis on *Jatakas* (stories of previous birth of the Buddha). The emphasis on the life of the Buddha may be because of the fact that Buddhism here was a foreign religion.

Mathura School

This school developed around the city of Mathura: an important city on the *uttarapatha* as well as the second capital of the Kushanas. The images discovered here belong to all the three religions: Buddhism, Brahmanism and Jainism. Besides, there are also few royal sculptures from Mathura depicting Kushana rulers. These were created using red spotted sandstone, easily available in the nearby Aravalli region.

Jaina sculptures have been recovered from a ruined *stupa* at Kankali Tila. They depict *Jina* in seated or standing pose. They look quite similar to Buddhist sculptures with minor differences. They are generally nude. The standing *Jina* is straight with hands long enough to reach the knee. The seated *Jina* is in *padmasana* (lotus-position or cross-legged posture) with hands in *dhyana mudra*. Jains venerate 24 *tirthankaras* who are distinguished by different emblems on their throne or chest: lion for Mahavira, bull for Rishabh etc. They also donated reliefs to the *stupa*, known as *ayagapatas*, in the form of square slabs depicting *Jina*, *stupa*, *swastika*, twin fish symbols, miscellaneous scenes etc.

Buddhist images, too, occur in both seated and standing variety. They are generally shown wearing a *dhoti* and shawl, with no jewellery and footwear. Facial features are inspired from *yaksha* images of the Mauryan era. Ears are elongated. Head is shaved. Body is stout and husky. The standing Buddha has no bend anywhere in the body. The seated Buddha is shown on a pedestal in *padmasana* with right hand in *abhaya* (benediction or boon-giving) *mudra* while left hand rests near left knee. Some additional features were added to the image: lightly decorated halo, *Bodhisattvas* or *Vidhyadharas* as attendants and a parasol above the Buddha.



Buddha Seated in *Abhaya-Mudra*, Kushana Period (c. 1st-3rd Century CE), Mathura Museum, Uttar Pradesh. Credit: Biswarup Ganguly. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Inscribed_Seated_Buddha_Image_in_Abhaya_Mudra_-_Kushan_Period_-_Katra_Keshav_Dev_-_ACCN_A-1_-_Government_Museum_-_Mathura_2013-02-24_5972.JPG).

Among Saivite deities a sculpture of Karttikeya (son of Siva) was discovered at Kankali Tila. His appearance is quite similar to the images of *Bodhisattvas*, the only distinction being the spear in his right hand. There is also a sculpture of Surya shown in a crouching position as if seated on a chariot. Two horses are depicted near his feet, possibly pulling the invisible chariot. There is also a relief of Vishnu and Balarama but very few representations of Krishna have been discovered belonging to this time.

Amravati School of Art

This school developed under the patronage of dynasties like the Satavahanas and Iksavakus. Both bas-reliefs and free-standing sculptures were produced. Satavahana reliefs have been found at Amaravati where they were used for decorating the *stupa*. They show the *stupa*, *Jataka* tales, scenes from the life of the Buddha and Buddhist symbols like *chakra*. Compared to the Sunga specimens there was great improvement in technique. The figures are deeply carved and have a natural appearance. According to Huntington, this may be because of the influence of Roman art. The reliefs created under the Ikshavakus show even further improvement. These have been recovered from their capital Nagarjunkonda. They were, again, used for decorating *stupas*. Great advancement is seen in the usage of space. The figures are well-placed. They have a slim appearance and look very lively.

Free-standing sculptures emerged towards the end of Satavahanas' reign of mainly the Buddha and *Bodhisattvas*. They have been discovered from Goli, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The material used is marble or limestone. Although the school is deeply influenced by Mathura, it has certain distinctive features. The Buddha is shown wearing *sanghati* which resembles a toga-like garment. It only covers the left shoulder. In origin, it could be a modification of Gandhara drapery or could be an indigenous conception. His face is closely modelled on the Buddha found on the reliefs. There is, however, a difference in the delineation of the body. Instead of slimmer physique in the reliefs, he has a massive body. His hair is in form of short ring-like curls. In iconography the right hand is in *abhaya mudra* but the left hand holds the hem of the garment. He stands barefoot on a plain pedestal. This image too has the *mahapurusha-lakshanas*. Images of *bodhisattvas*, unlike in the Mathura and Gandhara school, are much rarer in the Amravati school.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) Explain the etymology and components of a *stupa*.

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- 2) Compare and contrast the Gandhara and Mathura school of art.

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15.3 GUPTA PHASE (c. 300-600 CE)

Art and architecture produced between c.300-600 CE has been celebrated by nationalist historians and art-historians as the Golden Age or Classical period. According to Coomaraswamy this period was marked by political stability and prosperity that enabled the emergence of exquisite art forms that were largely indigenous with no foreign influence from Greece and West Asia. The art of this time, in his words, “is self-possessed, urbane, at once exuberant and formal”. This new expression influenced the entire country and all the religions: Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

15.3.1 Architecture

Temples

Temples of the Gupta period can be divided into:

- i) Early Gupta style
- ii) Late Gupta style

The early Gupta style is dated from 3rd century to 5th century CE. There are both cave and free-standing temples made under this style. One such Cave complex was discovered at Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. Around 20 caves were excavated in the low-lying sandstone hills. Three of them bear Gupta period inscriptions: two issued during Chandragupta II's reign and one during Kumaragupta's reign. In architectural plan all the temples here are single-roomed structures having a pillared porch for entrance. Interiors are mainly plain. However, rich decoration is visible on the doorways. The porch was not excavated but built separately from stones. The pillars in it had a square base, an octagonal shaft and a vase-shaped capital.



Temple no. 17 at Sanchi. Credit: Biswarup Ganguly. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Temple_17_-_Buddhist_Monument_-_Sanchi_Hill_2013-02-21_4494.JPG).

Free-standing structures had a similar architectural plan. The best example is the Vishnu temple at Tigawa. It has two parts – a small square chamber and a pillared porch. The porch stands on four octagonal pillars with square base and four lion capitals. The whole structure has a flat roof. Walls are mostly plain. The only decoration visible is near the doorway in the form of reliefs of river-goddesses Ganga and Yamuna identified by their respective *vahanas* — crocodile and tortoise (according to John Guy this is because the Ganges has a rich crocodile population and Yamuna has a rich tortoise population). Another temple with a similar plan is temple no. 17 at Sanchi.

The later Gupta style, dated between 5th and 6th century CE, is characterized by an increase in the complexity of plan. The temples now were built on a plinth or platform provided with staircase. The flat roof was replaced by a tower that could be either pyramidal or curvilinear in shape. They were built with stone set together with dowels or with bricks glued with mud mortar. Further, the doorways and external walls were more elaborately decorated on which we find depiction of gods and goddesses of the growing Hindu pantheon, floral patterns etc. Best examples of this style are:

- 1) Vishnu temple at Deogarh and Bhitargaon
- 2) Parvati temple at Nachna-Kuthara
- 3) Shiva temple at Bhumara

Buddhist Cave Buildings

Buddhist cave buildings continued to be built in the Western Ghats under the patronage of Guptas and Vakatakas. They have been found at Ajanta and Bagh, of which Ajanta caves are best preserved. They consist of 30 caves of which cave nos. 19 and 26 are *caitya* halls and the rest are *viharas*. About six of these were excavated during the post-Mauryan period for the Hinayana sect. In the Gupta age *Mahayana* monks largely occupied these caves. Since this sect believes in image worship of the Buddha we see rich sculptural representations of the Buddha and *bodhisattvas* decorating the caves.

The building plans of *caityas* of this period are not very different from the plans found in the post-Mauryan period. Out of the two *caitya* halls, cave 19 is an older building. It has an inscription of Harishena, a Vakataka ruler, inscribed in the early part of his reign. The entrance is still designed as a pillared portico. It contains a doorway, above which is an ogee-curved arch within which there is a sun-window. What is innovative is the decoration. There are several sculptural representations of the Buddha, each enclosed within pilasters. Style of the figures is very similar to the Sarnath school. The interior of the cave is planned slightly differently. The first thing greeting the visitor is a covered courtyard surrounded with four cells. The purpose of the cells is not understood. After this we have an apsidal hall divided into a nave and side aisle by a colonnade of pillars. The pillars are thicker and are decorated with fluted patterns and a cushion capital. At the centre of the hall is the object of worship, a *stupa* with *harmika* and several *chhatris*. On its dome a standing Buddha has been carved. The *harmika* has a carving of the seated Buddha. The roof is barrel vaulted in shape and covered with beams. The spaces between these beams are covered with miniature paintings of the seated Buddha. The side aisle has nothing significant and has plain walls.

15.3.2 Sculpture

Udayagiri and Eran Sculptures

The Udayagiri cave temples are not just the oldest Hindu cave temples in India but also have the best preserved sculptural representations of Hindu deities. A study of these indicates that the iconographic formula of Hindu deities had fully matured in this period.

Siva is preserved in cave 4 in the *ekamukhalingam* (lingam with one face) form. Unlike the Gudimallam specimen he has a fuller face, almond shaped eyes with heavy lids and fleshy lips. Huntington says that this was inspired from the late-Kushana Mathura art. Cave 3 has a sculpture of standing Karttikeya whose facial features are similar to the above. His standing pose with feet apart and knees slightly bent is very similar to the Mathura images. Outside this shrine two *dvarapalas* (doorkeepers) are depicted. Ganesha (god of good luck) does not have any separate shrine dedicated to him; he is carved on the left wall outside cave 6.

Among the Vaishnavite deities the most impressive representation is in cave 5. There is a colossal relief of Varaha (boar *avatara* of Vishnu) rescuing earth from drowning in the ocean. The earth is represented as a maiden. Varaha stands with his left leg resting on a rock and right leg straight. The body is husky, giving an impression of a strong figure. Near the left leg *nagas* are shown paying respect. In the upper portion *rishis* and celestial beings are praising the Varaha. This



Varaha Panel at Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh). Credit: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:375-415_CE,_Udayagiri_Hindu_Caves,_Varaha_rescuing_goddess_earth_legend,_Les_grottes_d%27Udayagiri_\(Inde\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:375-415_CE,_Udayagiri_Hindu_Caves,_Varaha_rescuing_goddess_earth_legend,_Les_grottes_d%27Udayagiri_(Inde).jpg)).

scene spreads on to adjacent walls. The right wall has reliefs of Ganga, Yamuna and the ocean. The two river-goddesses are identified through their *vahanas*: Ganga on *makara* (crocodile) and Yamuna on tortoise. Vishnu is also presented in his *anantashayana* (literally meaning “sleeping on the serpent Ananta”) form in cave 13. His head is not well preserved.

At another historical site, Eran in Madhya Pradesh also, there have been recovered outstanding sculptures of Vaishnava deities in the form of Narasimha, two Varahas and one free-standing pillar depicting Vishnu’s *vahana* Garuda. The first Varaha was made during the time of Samudragupta. It is made of sandstone. The style is quite similar to that of Udayagiri cave relief. A sash is tied around his waist. The earth goddess hangs from his tusk. The Narasimha sculpture is another outstanding piece. Like Varaha he has a strong physique with four arms, wide shoulders and flat head. He too wears a sash. The second Varaha is executed and decorated very differently. It belongs to the time of Huna invader Toramana. The boar stands on his four feet with Prithivi hanging from his tusk. We have small panels of *rishis* (saints) seeking shelter in him.



Varaha at Eran in zoological form. Credit: Arnold Betten. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eran,_Varaha_und_Garuda-S%C3%A4ule_\(1999\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Eran,_Varaha_und_Garuda-S%C3%A4ule_(1999).jpg)).

A free-standing pillar has also been found. The inscription on it tells us that it was commissioned in 485 CE by a local ruler. It has a square shaft, bell-shaped capital, surmounted by a square abacus with a pair of lions on each side. At the top we have a wheel and on either side we have two male figures. They represent Garuda, identified by their holding a serpent. It perhaps stood opposite the Vishnu temple.

Sarnath School of Art

The earliest samples discovered at Sarnath were mainly of the Mathura school. However, in the last quarter of 5th century the site developed its own unique sculptural art. This is reflected in the standing Buddha image donated by a Buddhist monk Abhayamitra in 473 CE. Three years later he donated two more standing Buddha idols.

The statues made under the Sarnath school during the Gupta era have very different characteristics from previous schools in the following respects:

- 1) First distinguishing trait is the execution of facial features. Eyes are cast downwards, nose is sharp and lips are curved in a gentle smile. The *mahapurusha-lakshanas* are not present: elongated ears, *ushnisha* and circle on the forehead. The overall effect is of a delicate face that has achieved great tranquillity and enlightenment.
- 2) The second distinguishing trait is the posture of the body. It stands in *abhanga* pose in which the body is either tilted left or right. It is covered in drapery but unlike the Gandhara ones, it does not have any folds. The drapery, in fact, looks transparent and could be even missed by the viewer if not for the crease near the waist and slight projection on right and left. Huntington believes that these sculptures were originally painted. The hands are in pose similar to the earlier schools: right in *abhaya mudra* and left in *dana mudra*.
- 3) The third unique characteristic of this school is its execution of halo. It was executed in two forms:
 - Circular halo, covering back of the head and shoulders, or
 - Elongated halo that covers the entire body.

At times these are plain but in many examples they are covered with intricate floral designs. In some pieces we also see the depiction of *vidhyadharas* on the top left and right and attendants near the feet of the Buddha.

The school also produced images of the seated Buddha. They share several features with their standing variants: serene face, *mahapurusha-lakshanas* and halos. The difference is in posture. He is mainly seated in *padmasana*. In the earlier schools the hands may be shown in *abhaya mudra*, variants of



Preaching Buddha in *Dharmachakra Mudra*, Gupta Period. Source: EHI-02, Block-4, Unit-17.

dhyana mudra or *dharmachakra mudra* (gesture of teaching). In this school there is a greater preference for *dharmachakra mudra*.

Gandhara and Mathura School of Art

Images of the Buddha continued to be produced during the Gupta epoch under Gandhara and Mathura schools. Gandharan sculptures have been mainly recovered from Hadda in Afghanistan. They were now increasingly made of stucco (lime plaster) instead of blue schist or green phyllite. In style there is continuity of the post-Mauryan period reflected in robe and hair style but the facial features have a softness possibly inspired from the Sarnath school.

The Mathura school of art also saw the influence of Gupta sensibility. The best specimen is a standing Buddha dated to 434 CE. It is made of red sandstone but execution is completely different from the post-Mauryan Mathura art. The body is slimmer and more graceful. Pose is more relaxed and we see a slight bent in the right leg. It is wearing a drapery with folds, somewhat similar to the Gandhara school. There is a round halo behind the head which is amply decorated.

15.4 POST-GUPTA PHASE

In the post-Gupta period significant contribution to the development of art and architecture was made by two southern dynasties: Pallavas and their neighbours, the Chalukyas of Badami. They mostly patronized Hindu temples. The Pallavas, who emerged around 600 CE, controlled large parts of Tamil Nadu. At times their empire even included parts of Deccan and Odisha. But, most of the architectural marvels of this dynasty have been found at Tamil Nadu. Their temples are mostly dedicated to Brahmanic deities, possibly under the influence of *Bhakti* saints *Alvars* and *Nayanars*. A new artistic idiom developed under the patronage of Pallavas. They were the first to encourage the usage of stone in buildings in south India. Both cave-temples and free-standing structures were constructed. This led to development of the Dravida architectural style.

They were frequently locked in conflict with the Chalukyas of Badami who rose to power in 543 CE under Pulakesin I. While they initially controlled Karnataka, under capable rulers like Kritivarman I and Pulakesin II they expanded their rule over Maharashtra and Andhra. The Andhra region was handed over to Pulakesin II's brother Vishnuvardhana who founded the collateral branch of the Chalukyas of Vengi, in 624 CE. Both the branches built significant architectural structures which occupy a unique position in the evolution of Hindu temple architecture. Like the Pallavas, they built caves as well as the free-standing temples. These are both in *nagara* as well as *dravida* style. It was perhaps this that led to an amalgamation of the two styles, leading to the development of a new *vesara* style. Therefore, in Badami we find temples made in all these three styles.

15.4.1 Pallava Architecture

Cave Temples

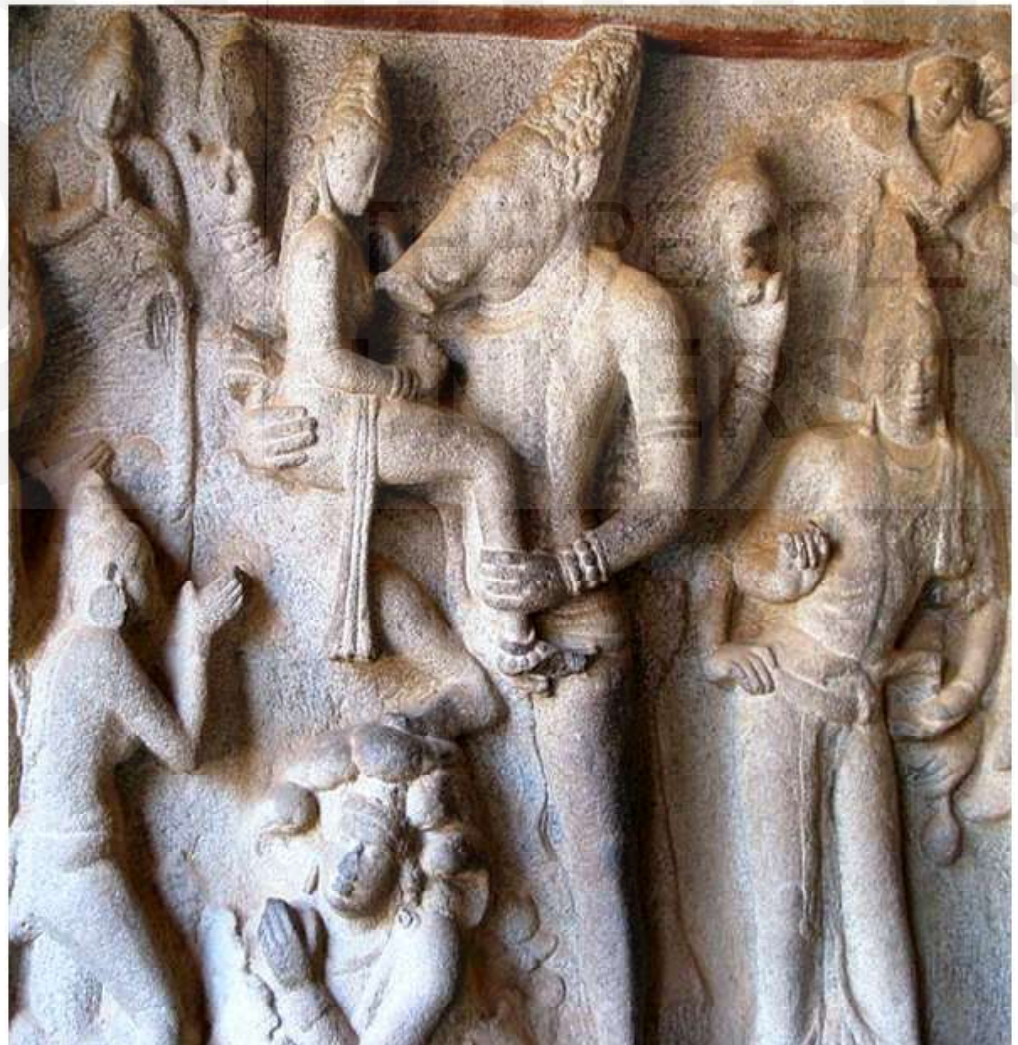
Pallava cave-temples were mainly built under two monarchs Mahendravarman I (590-630 CE) and his successor Narasimhavarman I (630-668 CE). In design these are very simple consisting of a huge *mandapam* (hall/pavilion/porch) and a cubical *garbha-griha* (*sanctum sanctorum* or innermost sanctuary wherein the image of principal deity is housed). The *mandapam* also doubled up as an entrance made of either pillars or pilasters.

Two cave temples were constructed under Mahendravarman I:

- 1) Lakshityatana at Mandagappattu
- 2) Lalitankura at Tiruchrapalli

An inscription informs us that Lakshityatana temple was dedicated to the Hindu Trinity but the dedication of Lalitankura is not known. Compared to the later temples, these are distinguished by having a very simple decoration scheme. On the entrance there are two reliefs of *dvarapalas*. The pillars or pilasters are also lightly decorated with motifs like medallions.

The cave temples built under Narasimhavarma I are located in the new city founded by him – Mamallapuram (today's Mahabalipuram). The Varaha cave temple is outstanding and lavishly decorated. It consists of a rectangular *mandapam* hall and a cubical shrine. The shrine is empty, making it difficult to identify its dedication, but the hall has beautiful reliefs of Varaha, Trivikrama (giant form of the Vamana *avatara* of Vishnu), Gaja-Lakshmi (Lakshmi seated on lotus and flanked with an elephant on both sides) and Durga. The entrance consists of two pillars and pilasters. Instead of plain pillars each pillar has a seated lion as base, a round shaft and a cushion-shaped abacus. Outside, near the entrance, we see for the first time a water-tank which became an essential feature of the Dravida style.



Varaha lifting Bhudevi (earth-goddess), Varaha Cave Temple, Mamallapuram. Credit: mountainamoeba. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Varaha-mahabalipuram.jpg>).



Facade of Varaha Cave-Temple. We can see lion motif at the base of the pillars. Credit: Vsundar. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vsvarahacave.jpg>).

Another cave temple – Trimurti cave – is less spectacular. It only has three cubical shrines built next to one another with no *mandapam*. The central shrine is dedicated to Siva, left one to Vishnu and right one to Brahma. The doors of each shrine has a relief of two *dvarapalas*. In addition, the wall next to the Brahma shrine also has a relief of Durga.

A unique cave associated with his reign is the Yali (lion) cave. It is located about 5 km. from Mamallapuram in Saluvakuppam village. The cave is shaped as a seated lion with face further decorated with mini-lions. In its entrance, too, there is a pillared porch with base of the pillars shaped as seated lions. The purpose of its creation is not understood.

Structural Temples

Free-standing temples built with stone blocks or bricks first emerged under Narasimhavarman II (700-728 CE). Best examples are:

- Shore temple at Mamallapuram
- Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram.

These temples added a new element to the architectural plan. They were built within a walled complex: a typical feature of the *Dravida* style.

The Shore temple at Mamallapuram derives its name from the fact that it overlooked an ancient port. Today, only the western portion of the structure is visible as the rest is buried under sand. The temple has three different shrines:

two dedicated to Siva and one to Vishnu. The Vishnu shrine is considered to be the oldest and at the front and back of it there is the Siva shrine. The roof of the Vishnu shrine is flat whereas the two Siva shrines have pyramidal roofs. Each shrine is provided with a circumambulatory passage. From ruins in the vicinity it is possible to argue that there existed other minor shrines, halls and a tank for ritual ablution. The entire complex is surrounded by a huge rectangular enclosure with a *gopuram* (gateway) on the west.



Frontal View of Shore Temple, Mamallapuram. Credit: mckaysavage. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mamallapuram.jpg>).



Shore Temple, Side View

Credit: Bernard Gagnon. Source: Wikimedia Commons. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Shore_Temple_01.jpg).

The Rajasimheshavara or Kailashanatha temple is located at Kanchipuram. Like the Shore temple it is located within a rectangular enclosure. The main shrine is square in shape and houses a *siva-linga*. It has a circumambulatory passage. The roof is pyramidal in shape topped with a *stupika* (top most part of a Hindu temple). It is decorated with barrel-vaulted structures. The main shrine is surrounded by nine small shrines. For the congregation of devotees a separate *mandapam* was built on its east. In later period the two buildings were joined with help of another pillared hall known as *antarala*.



One Side View of Kailashanatha Temple, Kanchipuram. Credit: Bikash Das. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:7th_century_Sri_Kailashnathar_Temple_Kanchipuram_Tamil_Nadu_India_01_\(5\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:7th_century_Sri_Kailashnathar_Temple_Kanchipuram_Tamil_Nadu_India_01_(5).jpg)).

15.4.2 Pallava Relief Sculpture

The sculptural art that developed under the Pallavas is mainly in the form of reliefs. Many of these reliefs were used in the decoration of temples depicting deities and mythological stories associated with them. Supplementing them are the representations of *dvarapalas*, seated lions and dwarves. Pallava style is characterized by slenderness of the figures and their highly animated look. Huntington traces this as influence of the post-Mauryan Amravati school of art. The figures are deeply carved and adequately spaced, creating an impression of a three dimensional image. What is innovative is the scale of these images. In most of the Indian schools, in order to emphasize centrality of the main figure, different scales were used for the characters. Thus, in the sculptures depicting the Buddha, the figure of the Buddha was huge and other figures like dwarves, attendants etc. were smaller. In Pallava reliefs, however, all figures have the

same scale. The main figure was emphasized by being placed centrally and being on a throne or pedestal.

Other than the temple reliefs an open-air relief was also discovered at Mamallapuram. A natural fissure in the rock divides it into left and right portions. The right portion on the lower side shows an elephant flock with two elephants depicted larger than the rest, walking towards the fissure. Near the fissure there is one figure with his left hand up as if he is lifting something. It is identified as Krishna lifting Govardhana. In the middle, on the fissure, there is depiction of *nagas*. The figures near the fissure are significant. In the lower half there is a figure shown in two different poses: one doing penance and other bowing to the *naga* deity. Above him there is a scene of *rishis* sitting on either sides of a mini shrine. Above this is the most significant representation. There is a figure doing a penance by standing on one leg and Siva in front of him bestowing a boon. This scene is construed as Arjuna's penance or Bhagiratha's which led to the descent of the Ganga. The latter interpretation has more weightage, given the fact that this relief was built over a tank which is now lost. It is believed that the rainwater flowed into the tank through the fissure. This relief, according to scholars, has an allegory. The Bhagiratha penance scene may imply ending of the drought and Krishna's scene can mean ending of the flood. The two scenes could be seen as glorifying the building of tanks, thus ending these extreme conditions. In other words, it underlines irrigation works undertaken by the Pallavas.

15.4.3 Architecture under the Chalukyas

Cave Temples

The cave temples built under Western Chalukyas are located at Badami and Aihole. At Badami there are three cave temples: two dedicated to Vishnu and one to Siva. They have similar plan. Unlike the Gupta and Pallava cave temples, the entrance here is in the form of an open courtyard which leads to a closed veranda after which there is *mandapa* which contains a cubical *garbha-griha*. The temples are beautifully decorated. Pillars of the veranda are square-shaped and decorated with medallions and garlands. The *mandapa*, however, has different set of pillars. They are round in shape with cushion capitals. Several relief sculptures decorate the walls and often depict stories related to the chief deity. Near the entrance there are reliefs of *dvarapalas* and dwarves.

Structural Temples

The dynasty built beautiful structural temples. Clusters of temples have been discovered at Pattadakal, Mahakuteshwar and Aihole. They were built with large stone blocks, set together without the help of mortar. Both *nagara* and *dravida* style temples were constructed. There are also specimens which are quite unique and cannot be classified either as *nagara* or *dravida*. The Chalukyas introduced new elements like open porch, use of balcony slabs and carving of auspicious motifs and figures on pillars. These later became a regular feature of temple architecture.

Aihole has some of their oldest temples like Gaudara Gudi, Chiki and Ladhkhan temples. These temples have a unique plan. A square *garbha-griha* is located within a pillared *mandapa*. The *mandapa* may be open as in Gaudara Gudi or closed as in Chiki and Ladhkhan temples. The temples are built on a platform

provided with a staircase. The roof of the temples might be slightly slanted. The Ladhkhan temple also has a small shrine on its roof accessed by a staircase below. It is believed that these temples were originally assembly halls and were later converted into temples.



Gaudara Gudi Temple, Aihole, Karnataka. Credit: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra. Source: Wikimedia Commons. ([https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_temple_Gaudara_Gudi_\(Aihole,_Inde\)_14383019304.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_temple_Gaudara_Gudi_(Aihole,_Inde)_14383019304.jpg)).

The *nagara* style temples have been discovered at Aihole, Pattadakal, Alampur and Mahakuteshwar. The temples at Alampur were built by their collateral branch, the Chalukyas of Vengi. In terms of architecture, some of the temples show further evolution of the *nagara* style. There is the beginning of the cruciform ground plan. The oldest temple in which this is visible is Huchchappayya temple at Aihole. In this the three components – *garbha-griha*, *mandapa* and *ardhamandapa* (entrance porch forming a transitional area between the outside and *mandapa* of the temple) – are built one after another forming a cruciform ground plan. The *garbha-griha* has the typical *nagara-shikhara* (curvilinear roof). Its *ardhamandapa* is designed as an open-porch. Other *nagara* temples built by this dynasty closely follow this plan. A slight variation is visible at Jambulinga temple at Pattadakal which has a closed *ardha-mandapa*.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) Write a note on Udayagiri and Eran sculptures.

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2) Discuss temple architecture under the Pallavas.

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15.5 SUMMARY

This Unit has been an attempt at surveying and analysing significant developments in art and architecture between the period *c.* 200 BCE- *c.*750 CE. Being a very broad chronological span, it is divided into post-Mauryan, Gupta and post-Gupta periods, each characterized by novel contributions. We have thrown light on these contributions. You also learnt about the elements of a *stupa* in post-Mauryan age, emergence of Buddhist rock-cut architecture, temple architecture in terms of both cave temples and free-standing temples and different sculptural schools and their chief characteristics.

Changes in art styles and the emergence of architectural idioms is, no doubt, an important subject of study. *Stupas* and *viharas* received extended patronage by various groups in the society. The Gupta era is marked by the formative stage of temple construction and post-Gupta age saw the flowering of different styles of temple architecture: *Nagara*, *Dravida* and *Vesara*.

15.6 KEYWORDS

Abacus: Slab forming top of the capital of a column.

Bas Relief: A form of sculpture where instead of converting entire stone into an image only a part of the stone is utilized to make an image. The resultant sculpture looks embedded into the stone.

Bodhisattva: Any person who is on the path towards the Buddhahood (the condition or rank of the Buddha/enlightenment/supreme state of life). It also means the “awakened one”. In *Mahayana* Buddhism it means a sentient person who is able to reach *nirvana* but delays it due to his compassionate heart for his fellow suffering beings.

Capital: Top portion of the pillar.

Iconography: Study of rules for making an image. For instance, a Vishnu image will have four hands, each carrying a *kaumodaki/gada* (mace), *chakra*, conch and lotus.

Kalpavriksha: Mythical tree that can grant any wish.

Pilaster: Pillar carved onto a wall.

Porch: Covered entrance of a building.

Shaft: Middle portion of a pillar.

Vidyadharas: Bearers of knowledge.

Yaksha and Yakshi/Yakshini: Forest spirits known from the time of *Rigveda*. They are seen as the cult of common folk. They could be good and evil. They were generally invoked for attaining wealth, prosperity and beauty.

15.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

- 1) See Sub-section 15.2.1
- 2) See Sub-section 15.2.2

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- 1) See Sub-section 15.3.2
- 2) See Sub-section 15.4.1

15.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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