

Ancient Indian Art and Culture

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Abstract: Most of the objects of Indian art are devotional in nature, they were created by craftsmen who steeped in tradition but still produced masterpieces. It has gone through many phases of change. India being country full of diversity created a number of imperial and regional styles of art and architectures. Harappans excelled in producing works of art of small compass. Their most notable artistic achievement was perhaps in their seal engravings. While the Pillars and Stupas from the Mauryan age stand testimony to the enlightened vision of a glorious era. The most famous among the Ancient India Stupas were the Sanchi, Amaravati, and Sarnath. Rock temples and mural paintings of Ajanta and Ellora. The magnificent heritage of the Chola and Pallava kings. The art and architecture of ancient India touched new heights during the rule of Gupta empire. South India too made remarkable contributions in art and architecture. These provide India with the spiritual joy of belonging, a reminder of a glorious heritage.

Keywords: Excavations, Stupas, Figurines, Depicts, Artifacts, Shrine, Sculptures, Deities, Terracotta, Flourished, Monochromes, Exhibits, Conventional, Caves, Imperial, Carved.

1. HARAPPAN ART

Many Harappan sites have been excavated. These excavations have revealed the artistic temperament of the Harappans. The Harappan art can be seen in –

Sculptures/Statues:

The more famous sculptures are those of a Dancing Female and The Priest from Mohenjodaro. The other sculptures of copper and bronze include the buffalo, chariot and a dog from Mohenjodaro. The best engravings are of the bull, rhinoceros, tiger etc. At Dholavira and Surkotda evidence of use of stone as a raw material for artifacts have come to light.

Terracotta Figurines:

The fire baked earthen clay figurines are called terracotta figurines. They have been found in vast numbers at all sites. A large number of terracotta figurines are of Mother Goddess. Most of the terracottas depict animals, specially the humped bull. Cow was never represented. Pinching method is used and these figurines are hand made.

Seals:

The Pashupati seal is the most famous from religious point of view. The Unicorn horse and Bull seal is the most popular and most of the seals of Harappa have this impression. The standard Harappan seal was a square or an oblong plaque, usually made of steatite. Their primary purpose was probably to mark the ownership of property, but they seem to have also served as amulets and were regularly carried on the person of their owners.

Fine arts:

Among fine arts, dance and music appears to have been cultivated among the Indus people. On two seals, we find a musical instrument resembling the modern mridangam. The bronze female dancer of Mohenjodaro and the statue representing a dancer found at Harappa suggest that dancing was also popular.

2. MAURYAN ART

Mauryan art is the first organized art activity and first imperial art in India in large scale and durable material. The architectural aspects can be seen from the ruins of patliputra and the stupas. Ashoka had been credited for making hundreds of Stupas. Since most of the buildings at Patliputra had been built in wood hardly any thing remains today. We are told by Megasthense that it had 640 towers and 64 gates.

The high skill of engineering and art of polishing can be seen in the Pillars. The pillars are made of two types of stone. Some are of the red and white sand stone from the region of Mathura and others of buff-coloured fine grained hard grey sand stone from chunar near Varanasi. The pillars are generally divided into four parts –

1. The Shaft 2. The Capital 3. The Abacus 4. The Crowning Animal

The Lauriya Nandangarh pillar is the most outstanding of all the pillars. Their capitals mainly consist of animal figures like bull, lion, elephant etc. the pillars were built of Chunar Sandstone.

The most famous capital is that of Sarnath where the four lions are sitting in four different directions. The Sarnath lion capital is used as the national symbol which can be seen on Indian currencies and documents.

The seven caves at Barabar and Nagarjuni hills show the art of polishing. These caves and pillars found in various corners of the country. These are the earliest known examples of the rock cut architecture. Three caves bearing Ashoka's Inscriptions belong to Barabar group, which are named as: the Karna Chaupar Cave, the Sudama Cave and the Lomasa risi cave. Of all the caves, the largest is known as the Gopika Cave, with its both ends semicircular. All these caves are marked by the Mauryan architectural characteristic of a bright polish shining from their walls.

3. GUPTA ART

The gupta period saw the beginning of the structural procedure. A firm foundation of temple architecture was laid in the Gupta period when the basic characteristic elements of the Indian temples-consisting of square sanctum and a pillered porch-emerged. The Gupta period constitutes an age of experiments in temple forms and types. In northern india the following well defined groups may be recognized among the temples of the Gupta period:

- 1) The flat-roofed square temple with a shallow porch in front.
- 2) The flat-roofed square temple with a covered ambulatory surrounding the sanctum cella and preceded by a porch in front, sometimes with a second storey above the shrine chamber.
- 3) The square temple with a low and squat tower or shikhara above.
- 4) The circular temple with shallow projections at the four cardinal faces.

So, **the first** and the earliest stage represented by temple no. 17 at Sanchi, temple of Tigawa and the temple at Eran(all in M.P.).

The second stage represented by parvati temple at Nachna and shiva temple at Bhumara(in M.P.)

The third stage represented by Dashavatara temple at Deogarh(Jhansi) and temple at Bhitargaon(Kanpur).

The fourth stage temple of Maninaga or Maniyarmath at Rajgir).

Sculptures:

The main features of Gupta sculptures are:-

- Most of the images are standing and slender.
- Halo becomes more refined and decorative.
- The forms become sophisticated and proportionate.
- The face is more rounded rather than ovalish as in Mathura.

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- The seated Buddha from Sarnath and the standing Buddha from Mathura are the best examples of Gupta Sculpture.

4. CONCLUSION

The art and architecture of Ancient India touched new height during the rule of Gupta Empire. Temple for the worship of Vishnu and Shiva were built with royal patronage. Temples were affected by the rulers of the regional kingdoms. The Buddhists initiated the rock-cut caves, Hindus and Jains started to imitate them at Badami, Aihole, Elephanta, Aurangabad and Mahabalipuram. A wide range of sculptural styles subsequently emerged in different parts of India over succeeding centuries. Indian rock art has continuously evolved, since the first rock cut caves, to suit different purposes, social and religious contexts, and regional differences.

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