

ARTS OF THE MAURYAN PERIOD

- 6TH century BCE marks the beginning of new religious and social movements in the Gangetic valley in the form of Buddhism and Jainism which were part of the shraman tradition.
- Magadha emerged as a powerful kingdom and consolidated its control over the other regions.
- By the fourth century BCE the Mauryas established their power and by the third century BCE, a large part of India was under Mauryan control.
- Ashoka emerged as the most powerful king of the Mauryan dynasty who patronised the shraman tradition in the third century BCE.
- Worship of Yakshas and mothergoddesses were prevalent during this time.
- Buddhism became the most popular social and religious movement.
- Yaksha worship was very popular before and after the advent of Buddhism and it was assimilated in Buddhism and Jainism.
- Erection of pillars was prevalent in the Achaemenian empire as well.
- Mauryan pillars are different from the Achaemenian pillars.
- The Mauryan pillars are rock-cut pillars that display the carver's skills, whereas the Achaemenian pillars are constructed in pieces by a mason.
- Stone pillars were erected all over the Mauryan Empire with inscriptions engraved on them.
- The top portion of the pillar was carved with capital figures like the bull, the lion, the elephant, etc.
- All the capital figures are polygonal and carved standing on a square or circular abacus.
- Abacuses are decorated with stylised lotuses.
- Some of the existing pillars with capital figures were found at Basarrah-Bakhira, LauriyaNandagarh, Rampurva, Sankisa and Sarnath.
- The Mauryan pillar capital found at Sarnath popularly known as the Lion Capital is the finest example of Mauryan sculptural tradition.
- Our title emblem carved with considerable care—voluminous roaring lion figures prominently standing on a circular abacus which is carved with the figures of a horse, a bull, a lion and an elephant in vigorous movement, executed with precision, showing considerable mastery in the sculptural techniques.
- Symbolising Dhammachakrapravartana (the first sermon by the Buddha) has become a standard symbol of this great historical event in the life of the Buddha.
- Monumental images of Yaksha, Yakhinis and animals, pillar columns with capital figures, rock-cut caves belonging to the third century BCE have been found in different parts of India.
- Shows the popularity of Yakshaworship and how it became part of figure representation in Buddhist and Jaina religious monuments.

- Large statues of Yakshas and Yakhinis are found at many places like Patna, Vidisha and Mathura. Mostly in the standing position, distinguishing elements in all these images is their polished surface.
- The depiction of faces is in full round with pronounced cheeks and physiognomic detail.
- One of the finest examples is a Yakshi figure from Didarganj, Patna, which is tall and well-built which shows sensitivity towards depicting the human physique where the image has a polished surface.
- Terracotta figurines show a very different delineation of the body as compared to the sculptures.
- Depiction of a monumental rock-cut elephant at Dhauili in Orissa shows modelling in round with linear rhythm.
- Ashokan rock-edict.

Lomus Rishi Cave

- The rock-cut cave carved at Barabar hills near Gaya in Bihar
- The facade of the cave is decorated with the semicircular chaitya arch as the entrance.
- The elephant frieze carved in high relief on the chaitya arch shows considerable movement.
- The interior hall of this cave is rectangular with a circular chamber at the back.
- The entrance is located on the side wall of the hall.
- The cave was patronised by Ashoka for the Ajivika sect.
- An isolated example of this period
- Many Buddhist caves of the subsequent periods were excavated in eastern and western India.
- Stupas were constructed over the relics of the Buddha at Rajagaha, Vaishali, Kapilavastu, Akappa, Ramagrama, Vethadipa, Pava, Kushinagar and Pippalvina.
- The textual tradition mentions construction of various other stupas on the relics of the Buddha at several places including Avanti and Gandhara which are outside the Ganges valley.
- Stupa, vihra and chaitya are part of Buddhist and Jaina monastic complexes but the largest number belongs to the Buddhist religion.
- One of the best examples of the structure of a stupa in the third century BCE is at Bairat in Rajasthan.
- It is a very grand stupa having a circular mound with a circumambulatory path.
- The great stupa at Sanchi (which will be discussed later) was built with bricks during the time of Ashoka and later it was covered with stone and many new additions were made.
- Donations by the guilds are also mentioned at several sites.

- Very few inscriptions mentioning the names of artisans such as Kanha at Pitalkhora and his disciple Balaka at Kondane caves.
- Artisans' categories like stone carvers, goldsmiths, stone-polishers, carpenters, etc. are also mentioned in the inscriptions.
- The Lion Capital discovered more than a hundred years ago at Sarnath, near Varanasi, is generally referred to as Sarnath Lion Capital.
- One of the finest examples of sculpture from the Mauryan period.
- Built in commemoration of the historical event of the first sermon or the Dhammachakrapravartana by the Buddha at Sarnath, the capital was built by Ashoka.
- The capital originally consisted of five component parts: (i) the shaft (which is broken in many parts now), (ii) a lotus bell base, (iii) a drum on the bell base with four animals proceeding clockwise, (iv) the figures of four majestic addorsed lions, and (v) the crowning element, Dharmachakra, a large wheel which was also a part of this pillar.
- Wheel is lying in a broken condition and is displayed in the site museum at Sarnath.
- The capital without the crowning wheel and the lotus base has been adopted as the National Emblem of Independent India.
- The lions appear as if they have held their breath.
- Kept in the archaeological museum at Sarnath, the capital has four lions firmly seated back to back on a circular abacus.
- The surface of the sculpture is heavily polished which is typical of the Mauryan Period.
- Their curly manes have protruding volume.
- The abacus has the depiction of a chakra (wheel) having twenty-four spokes in all the four directions and a bell, a horse, an elephant and a lion between every chakra is finely carved.
- A lion capital was also been found at Sanchi but is in a dilapidated condition.
- The life-size standing image of a Yakshini holding a chauri (flywhisk) from Dargun near Mohapatna is another good example of the sculptural tradition of the Mauryan Period.
- Stupas are elaborately built with certain additions like the enclosing of the circumambulatory path with railings and sculptural decoration.
- The stupa consists of a cylindrical drum and a circular abacus with a harmika and chhatra on the top which remain consistent throughout with minor variations and changes in shape and size.
- During the early phase of Buddhism, Buddha is depicted symbolically through footprints, stupas, lotus throne, chakra, etc.
- This indicates either simple worship, or paying respect, or at times depicts historicisation of life events.
- Thus events from the life of the Buddha, the Jataka stories, were depicted on the railings and torans of the stupas.

- While events from the life of the Buddha became an important theme in all the Buddhist monuments, the Jataka stories also became equally important for sculptural decorations.
- The main events associated with the Buddha's life which were frequently depicted were events related to the birth, renunciation, enlightenment, dhammachakrapravartana, and mahaparinibbana(death).
- Among the Jatakastories that are frequently depicted are Chhadanta Jataka, Vidurpundita Jataka, Ruru Jataka, Sibi Jataka, Vessantara Jatakaand Shama Jataka.

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