

**SEMESTER IV**  
**SEC – B(2)**  
**Module II**

**INDIAN ART (c. 600 BCE - 600CE)**

**Sculpture** :The Mauryan period witnessed the regular introduction of stone as a medium of sculpting. The outstanding examples of Maurya sculptural art are the Asokan pillars and the capitals atop them (consisting of animals).In the visual art of the Mauryan period is conspicuously absent a human figure, especially that of the ruler. One salient exception to this general pattern is the enchanting female figure, celebrated as the Didarganj yakshi, which was found from Patna. The principal medium of sculptures were the Chunar sandstone. According to Niharranjan Ray, Mauryan art was a court art – a unique and isolated chapter in the history of early Indian visual art – which needs to be situated in the context of the propagation of the ideology of Dhamma with a view to integrating a vast realm marked by immense diversity.

From the points of view of the theme, composition, treatment and even material (the Chunar sandstone), there is a visible change in the art of the post –Mauryan times from the Mauryan tradition.

The post -Mauryan sculptural tradition were divided into three schools :

1. **Gandhara** – The Gandhara school flourished between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, it continued till the 7<sup>th</sup> century in parts of Kashmir and Afghanistan. It flourished in the north-western frontier region. Its themes were Indian but its style Graeco-Roman. Images of Buddha and *bodhisattvas* were favourite themes. The Graeco-Roman influence is clear in the facial features and curly or wavy hair, the muscular body, and the fine, deeply delineated folds of the robes.
2. **Mathura** – The extremely rich sculptural tradition of Mathura is easily distinguishable by its principal medium, the red-spotted sand stone, locally available in Mathura. It is completely indigenous and show no trace of foreign influence. The Yaksha figure was sculpted in large numbers in this school of art. Mathura is renowned for the creation of numerous Buddha images. The Mathura sculptures are also famous for its female figures.
3. **Amaravati** – The art of Amaravati also drew heavily on Buddhist tradition. A distinctive feature of Amaravati style is a thrust on delineating figures in a pronouncedly elongated manner, though plasticity of the form was never hampered nor compromised. The other feature of this style is to densely pack the surface of the sculpture with many figures, leaving little vacant space between figures. The scenes are often endowed with pronounced element of whirlwind movements and an attempt to impart a sense of dramatic movements. The deliberate portrayal of elongated limbs, sometimes even by elongating the head-dress or crown in the Amaravati sculptures gives a special effect of linear rhythm.

The period c. 300-600CE shows a continuation of earlier styles and trends derived from the Mathura and Gandhara schools, but also the introduction of new ones. Much of the sculpture was inspired by themes drawn from Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jaina traditions. The iconographic conventions of religious sculpture became elaborated and fixed. The sculpture of this period is rich in ornamental designs such as foliated scroll.

**Numismatic Art** : The oldest coins found in the sub-continent are punch-marked coins, made mostly of silver, some of copper. Symbols on these coins include geometric designs, plants, animals, the sun, wheel, mountain, tree, branches and human figures. The next are the coins of the Indo-Greek rulers. They bear the name and portrait of the issuing rulers on the obverse. The Kushanas were the first dynasty to mint gold coins. Kushana coins have the figure, name, and title of the king on the obverse. On the reverse are deities belonging to the Brahmanical, Buddhist, Greek, Roman and other pantheons. B.N. Mukherjee has drawn our attention to the numismatic art of the Gupta rulers. The central point of his argument is that coins of this period were endowed with considerable aesthetic appeal when artists carved out figures of rulers (on the obverse) and deities (on the reverse). The same parameters of plastic modeling and unbroken linear rhythm – a hallmark of sculptures of this time – were closely followed by artists

on the compact and relatively circumscribed space of a coin. This will be evident in the elegant representations of Samudragupta playing a musical instrument, Chandragupta II slaying a lion.

**Paintings** : The caves of Ajanta are replete with the masterpieces of the painters of this age. A salient feature of the painting style at Ajanta is that all figures seem as if they come out from the background wall surface, leaving thereby an impression of the third dimension of depth and perspective. All figures are shown as if looking outwards and towards their onlookers, and never shown as looking inwards towards their background. Following Kramrisch, this style may be said to have been endowed with a 'direction of forthcoming'.

### **Architecture**

**Stupa** : The stupa, as the term suggests, is a mound, which initially was an earthen one, raised over the mortal remains of the deceased. *Stupas* are of three broad types :

1. *Sarira/ Dhatu stupa* – these were raised over the mortal remains of the Buddha and his disciples.
2. *Paribhogika stupas* – these were associated with the veneration of the objects used by Buddha.
3. *Nirdesika or Uddesika stupa* – These were commemorative in nature, raised to perpetuate the hallowed memory of some aspects of the Buddha's life.

In subsequent times, devout Buddhists constructed miniature *stupas* as a remembrance of their visit to sacred Buddhist centres; they were votive *stupas*.

The *stupa* stands on a raised circular platform (*vedika*) on which stood a semi-circular dome (*anda*). On the top it is a square box like structure (*harmika*). The *harmika* was protected with railings. Inside the *harmika* the mortal remains of Buddha or portions of objects used by him were stored in a casket. The *harmika* was protected by an umbrella like object (*chhatravali* with the *chhatradanda*). Example : Bharhut, Sanchi, Amaravati etc.

**Chaitya** – The *chaitya* was constructed by cutting rocks to provide cave-shelter for monks. The ground plan of the *chaitya* is usually oblong or rectangular with an apsidal back. At the end of the *chaitya* hall usually stood a *stupa* for worship. Along the length of the hall on both sides are seen several decorated columns with the base resembling the pitcher. The superstructure consists of a barrel vaulted roof, which is formed by pairs of rib-like vaults from the two sides. Between the walls and the pillars was located the circumambulatory path. The *chaitya* opening resembled a horse-shoe; the horse-shoe shaped façade was embellished with a window through which sunlight entered *chaitya* hall. The entrance was usually decorated with beautiful sculptures, including the figures of donors to the *chaitya*. Example : Nasik, Karle etc.

**Vihara** – They are monastery meant for the residence of monks and nuns. Buddhist and Jaina *viharas* at the initial phase were often a combination of several caves. With the growing need for larger *viharas* in later times, brick-built *viharas* came into existence. Example : Ajanta caves

**Temple** : The period from 300-600 CE marks the initial phase of building structural temples. The early temples were small. The square *garbha-griha* was just large enough to house the image. There was a small portico and the roof was usually flat. Later temples reveal some changes. They were built on a raised plinth and had a *shikhara* (spire). The pillars of later temples of this period have capitals in the form of *purna-kalashas* (water-pots). Example : Dashavatara temple at Deogarh in Jhansi district, Vishnu temple at Tigawa etc.

*Dr. Sudarsana Choudhury*  
*Associate Professor of History*