

INTRODUCTION

The word '**prehistoric**' refers to that part of history when paper and written word had not yet been discovered. The desire to communicate and express led humans to paint and scribble on the walls of their living spaces acting as their canvas that we now know as prehistoric rock paintings. It is truly wonderful that these paintings have survived the test of time and historians are able to crack some information which brings to light the lifestyle, tools, pottery, etc. of those times.

About 25000 years ago, the world was fully covered with thick jungles. Our ancestors lived in caves, in valleys, near streams, or by rivers and pools. They ate various grasses, fruits and vegetables or killed beasts for food. With this kind of life, when did man start creating works of art? What forced him to do so? What did these earliest works of art look like? History of Art seeks answers to these questions.

Prehistoric man struggled to fulfill his daily needs like food, clothing and safety from big beasts, heat, rain and other natural disasters. He was too weak to fight with natural disasters and found it difficult to kill the big beasts. He made drawings on the walls of the caves with wood, stone, mud and other natural material. There are images of symbols that he used in rituals and prayers that put light on man's psyche to please the supreme controlling power and the beginning of art for holy purpose as well.

Humans produced their first works of art during the Upper Paleolithic period—Aurignacian period (45000 B.C.E.—35000 B.C.E.). The earliest images made were a series of random lines or grooves made by dragging

the finger. Later on, engraving with some tools along the soft layer of clay on the walls was added on. The subject matter included simplified human figures, their day-to-day activities, geometric forms and symbols.

The prehistoric rock art has been broadly divided into seven periods :

Period I - (Upper Paleolithic) : During this period, there are line drawings of huge figures of animals such as bison, tigers and rhinoceroses in green and dark red. A few are in wash, but mostly they are filled with geometric patterns.

Period II - (Mesolithic) : The largest number of paintings belongs to this period. Comparatively smaller in size, the stylised figures in this group show linear decorations on the body. Animals, human figures and hunting scenes dominate as subjects. There is also a depiction of love for animals probably the beginning of their domestication and conservation. A few engravings of animals are also found.

Period III - (Chalcolithic or Copper age) : Common themes in ceramics and rock paintings found in Chalcolithic age are cross-hatched squares and grids. Pottery and metal tools are also shown.

Period IV & V - (Early historic) : The figures of this group have a schematic and decorative style and are painted mainly in red, white and yellow. Here, we see the depiction of religious symbols, figures of yakshas, tree gods and magical sky chariots with riders wearing tunic-like dresses.

Period VI & VII - (Medieval) : Paintings in the medieval era are geometric, linear and more schematic, but they are rough in their artistic style.

The first ever discovery of rock cave paintings was made in India in 1867-68 by an archeologist, Archibald Carlleyle. This discovery was twelve years before the discovery of Altamira in Spain. Later, a large

Fire is believed to be discovered in the lower Palaeolithic era, much before traces of art in cave paintings have been found. The wheel was invented circa 3,500 B.C.E. The discovery of fire and wheel thereafter were instrumental in the making and baking of pottery. These two inventions brought the beginning of terracotta sculptures.

number of sites were unearthed by Indian and foreign archeologists in a joint effort. These sites were found in several districts like Hoshangabad, Panchmarhi in Madhya Pradesh, Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar under the Kaimur range, Raigarh in Chhatisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Raichur in Karnataka and Kumaon hills in Uttarakhand.

BHIMBETKA*

The caves of Bhimbetka were discovered in 1957-58 by a brave archaeologist Dr. Vishnu Wakankar. Bhimbetka is a natural art gallery and an archaeological treasure. Spread over miles, these caves trace the footsteps of the prehistoric man from as early as about 15,000 years ago. These magnificent paintings can be seen even on the ceilings of rock shelters located at great heights. These caves remained covered with dense forest and vegetation that protected these rock paintings from natural calamities.

Location

The Bhimbetka caves are close to Bhopal on the way to Hoshangabad in Madhya Pradesh spread in an area of ten square kilometers. It has about eight hundred rock shelters out of which five hundred have paintings.

Material Used

The paints were made by grinding various rocks and minerals like manganese, hematite and wooden coal. They got red from haematite (known as *geru* in India). The green came from a variety of a stone called chalcedony. White might have been made out of limestone and black from wooden charcoal. The rock of mineral was first ground into powder and then mixed with water and some thick or sticky substance such as animal fat and extracts of leaves or gum or resin from trees. Brushes were made of plant fibre. Amazingly, these colours have survived thousands of years of adverse weather conditions.

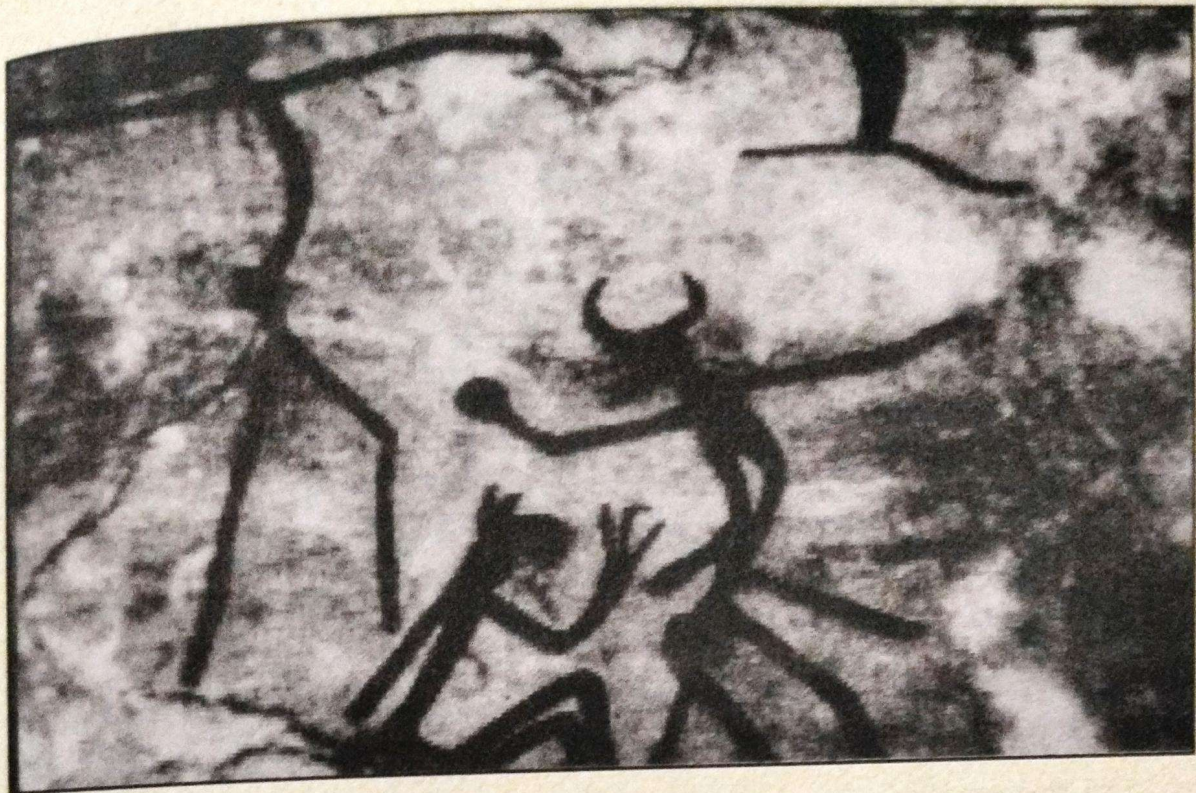
*Interesting story behind the nomenclature : Bhimbetka owes its name to the characters of the epic, Mahabharata. It is believed that when the five brothers—Pandavas were in exile, they came here and stayed in these caves, the massive rocks seating the enormous Bhima, the second Pandava. The names of the nearby places after the names of the Pandavas support this theory. However, the authenticity of these claims for nomenclature still remains to be proved due to the absence of concrete evidence.

Subject Matter

Bhimbetka caves are painted mainly in red and white, with an occasional use of green, orange, red, ochre, purple, brown, black and yellow. Themes are taken from the everyday events, the scenes usually depict hunting, dancing, horse and elephant riders, animal fights, honey collection, decoration of bodies, masks and different types of animals etc.

Many animals such as bison, tiger, rhinoceros, wild boar, elephants, monkeys, antelopes, lizards, peacocks etc. have been depicted in the rock shelters. Popular religious and ritual symbols also occur frequently.

Bhimbetka paintings portray live records of the development of style from linear representation to more evolved shapes and forms. Our prehistoric paintings are similar to those found in Matopos in Zimbabwe, Altamira in Spain, and Lascaux in France. The simplicity, directness and vitality of primitive paintings have inspired some of the greatest modern artists of the world.



- NAME** : WIZARD'S DANCE
- MEDIUM** : MINERAL COLOUR, STONE
- *PERIOD** : CIRCA 8000 B.C.E. (STONE AGE)
- LOCATION** : BHIMBETKA CAVE 50 km SOUTH OF BHOPAL, M.P.
- COURTESY** : NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI, CENTRE OF CULTURAL RESOURCES & TRAINING CENTRE, NEW DELHI.

SUBJECT MATTER / THEME : A ceremonial dance of the wizard¹-like cavemen to depict some joyful celebration or some ritualistic² dance to please a god.

DESCRIPTION : The Painting is on a cave wall in Bhimbetka of M.P. This is perhaps the earliest example of the development of music, dance, theatre and use of masks.

* 2500 B.C.E. to 1500 B.C.E. (Stone Age), as given in CBSE syllabus.

1. a person who is believed to have magic powers
2. ceremonial

On one side, there is a figure standing in a joyful mood with arms outstretched. There are two more figures in the middle, one seated and one standing. They are wearing masks on the faces and horns on the heads. Two figures dancing behind are also participating in the group. Thick black lines are drawn without any filling of color in them. The figures are simple, elongated, stick-like and curved at places showing movement and high spirits. They are indulging in some dance ritual of prayer or a magical healing or pleasing a powerful jungle god.

Overall, we can say that this wall painting reminds us of tribal dances nowadays with body paints. From times immemorial, man has been involved in pleasing gods and nature by ritualistic dance and music.

ART OF INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION

(PERIOD - 2500 B.C. to 1500 B.C.)

INTRODUCTION

Charles Masson, a soldier and explorer from the East India Company, first discovered the ruins of Harappa in 1842. Sir Alexander Cunningham who later became the Director General of Archaeological Survey of Northern India, published the first seal in 1856. More seals of Harappa were excavated half a century later.

LOCATION AND FAMOUS SITES

This civilization is called Indus Valley Civilization because it was mostly concentrated on the banks of the river Indus. The site also takes its name from a modern village called Harappa, located near the former course of the Ravi River. The most important cities of this culture are Harappa and Mohenjo-daro (meaning Mounds of the dead) district Larkana which are situated in the present day Pakistan. There are a few surrounding sites too, which are in bordering parts of India. Some of the sites are as follows :

(i) Mohenjo-daro and Harappa, now in Pakistan; (ii) Roopnagar in Punjab; (iii) Lothal in Gujarat; (iv) Kalibangan in Rajasthan; (v) Rangpur, in Gujarat; (vi) Alamgirpur, a village near Meerut in U.P; (vii) Banawali, in Fatehabad, Haryana; (viii) Dholavira, in Kutch district, Gujarat; (ix) Some places in U.P.

TRACES OF ARTISTIC THINGS

One of the major achievements of this civilisation was their urban civic planning. Their houses, drainage system, public baths, markets, etc. were remarkable. People used to make Terracotta figures, sculptures, seals, ornaments, and pottery with fine aesthetic sensibility and clear imagination. Some sculptures are treated realistically, whereas some are very simplified in terms of detail. Some of these artefact remains can be seen in the National Museum, New Delhi.

The utensils have been decorated with images of gods, goddesses, women figures and geometrical patterns. Some utensils also have designs

made with lines, angles, circles, arcs and with leaves and flowers in black ink. Thereafter, the surface is smoothened and a glossy finish is added which is still intact after thousands of years.

Beads made of terracotta and some beautifully decorated birds were also found. Even skeletons of some animals such as dog, cow, cat, deer, rabbits, sheep and bulls of two types (with hump and without hump) were found. Decorated seals were also excavated mostly with a religious image carved on them.

Several golden and silver ornaments like nose pins, bangles, ear rings, armlets, bracelets, etc. are also seen in the findings. Toys like a jumping monkey and a cart of clay without wheels have also been excavated. Many other things of daily use such as combs, buttons, ear-rings, hairpins, clips and caps were also found. Various hairstyles and buns are noticed, which suggest that they too had a concept similar to present day beauty salons. Male figures wearing a type of printed shawl as seen on the sculpture of the High Priest, have been found.

BRONZE CASTING

The Indus Valley Civilization had made great advances in metal sculptures mainly bronze, using a fascinating technique known as the **lost wax process**. In this process, the sculptures were first made out of wax. A layer of clay was then put over this wax, and the sculpture was then heated. This resulted in the melting of wax through a tiny hole made in the clay mould, leaving behind a hollow mould. Molten metal was then poured into this mould. After cooling, the clay was removed, and a metal sculpture remained. The same technique mastered over centuries led to the later masterpieces of Chola Bronzes.

NAME : MOTHER
GODDESS

MEDIUM : TERRACOTTA
(BAKED CLAY)

PERIOD : CIRCA 2500 B.C.E.

LOCATION : MOHENJO-DARO

SIZE : 22 × 8 × 5 cm

COLLECTION : NATIONAL
MUSEUM,
NEW DELHI.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A terracotta idol of the fertility goddess.

DESCRIPTION : It is one of the best preserved, large sized terracotta images representing the Mother Goddess. The significance of the broad, pan like attachments on both sides of the hairdo of the head of the goddess is quite unique. The pinched nose and ornamentation are flatly laid on the body and pressed on to the figure. The general folk art effect in the figure is most interesting. She is wearing just a loin cloth with a girdle, small breasts uncovered; Eyes are small balls (pellet) of clay. The sculptor at Mohenjo-daro was skilled in his art and could create both realistically and stylistically.

This sculpture of Mother Goddess and various other mother goddesses were worshipped as the bestowers/givers of fertility and prosperity. India is traditionally a country where more than 80 percent of its inhabitants are agriculturists who naturally worship gods and goddesses of fertility and prosperity. She is perhaps the prototype* of a crude idol of one such goddess.



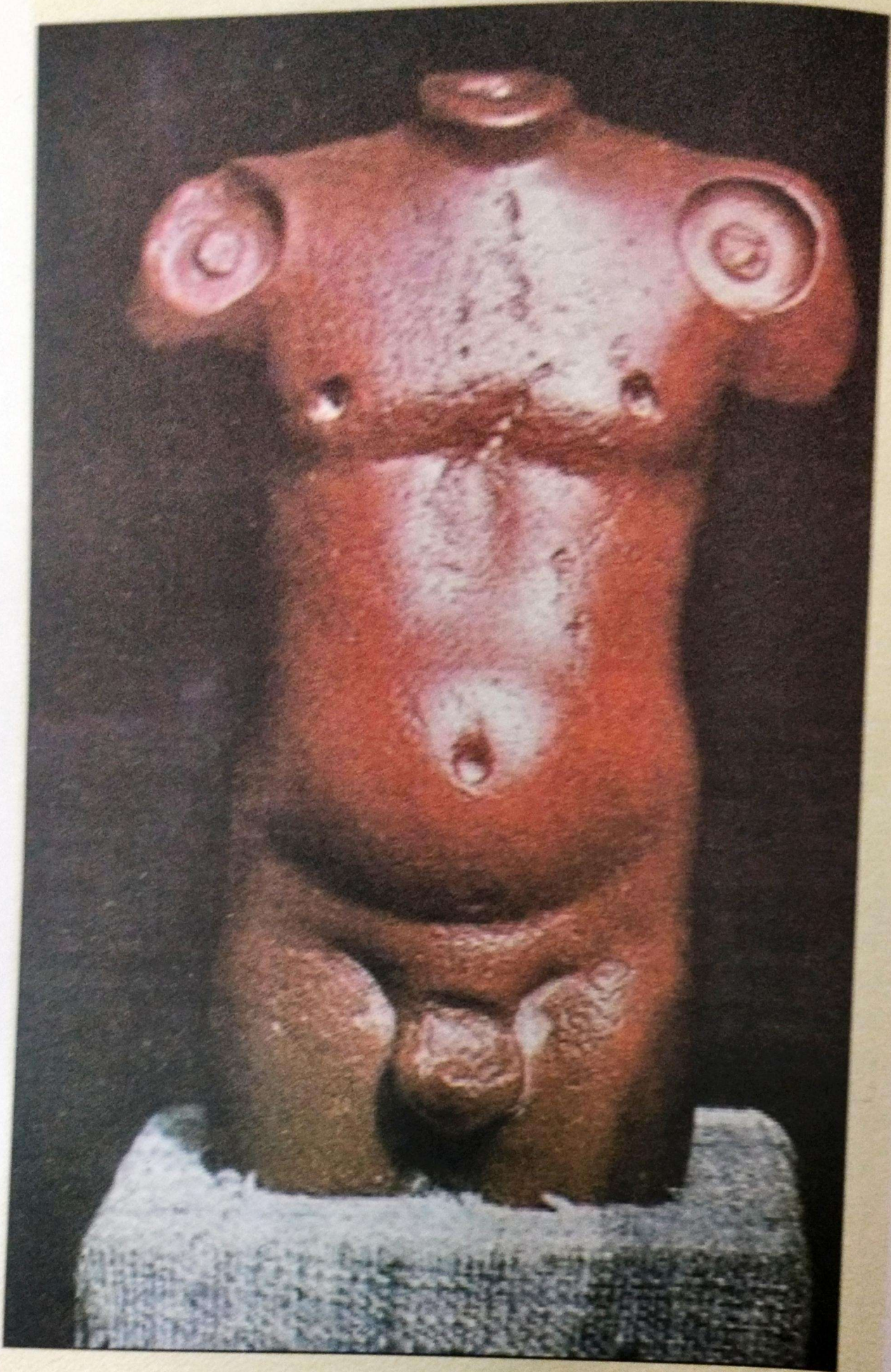
* first existing example



NAME : DANCING GIRL
MEDIUM : BRONZE
PERIOD : CIRCA 2500 B.C.E.
LOCATION : MOHENJO-DARO
SIZE : 10.5 × 5 × 2.5 cm (4.1 inches) high
COLLECTION : NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A small bronze statue of a dancing girl.

DESCRIPTION : This is one of the greatest achievements of the artists of Mohenjo-daro as the masters of miniature. The bronze statue of the dancing girl is only four inches high. And yet it speaks volumes of a metal caster's excellent skills. This world-famous figure shows a female figure standing in a tribhanga pose as if relaxing after a dance number, with her right hand resting on her hip and the left entirely covered with bangles resting on the left leg forward. The head is slightly tilted and the hair is tightened with a ribbon upon the shoulder. She appears to be holding a vessel in her left hand. Her eyes are large; neck is decorated with a cowry shell necklace. Her arms and legs look disproportionate, may be for the sake of simplicity. The dark medium of bronze is right for the dark negroid facial features. The features do not actually have a resemblance to any particular female face. The lips and nose are thick and the elongated, half-closed eyes resemble the Limestone Bust of High priest¹. The physical details of the body are also very less except for small breasts, curved waist and bare groin. The female figures of this civilisation are believed to be devoted to the power of fertility of women.



NAME : MALE TORSO
MEDIUM : RED LIMESTONE
PERIOD : CIRCA 2500 B.C.E.
LOCATION : HARAPPA
SIZE : $9.2 \times 5.8 \times 3$ cm
COLLECTION : NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A realistic Male torso.

DESCRIPTION : Male Torso is an impressive example of stone carving and handling of three dimensional volumes at Harappa nearly five thousand years ago. Surprisingly, the sculptor of thousands years ago at Harappa could produce a figure as fine as a Greek artistry from 5th century B.C.E.

The sculpture shows a muscular and robust male in absolutely realistic human details. The chest and stomach are given a perfect shape, giving a feeling of *prana* / breath in the rounded belly. If it is seen from behind, the roundness of shoulders and hips is incised by the line of spine in the centre and a deep curve at the waist. There is a hole at the neck wherein the single head or multiple heads could have been inserted or attached. The drill circles at the shoulders are unexplained and its arms and legs are broken. This study of the body shows the mastery of the sculptor in using this medium.

There is a theory that the figure may have had several heads and arms, because the pose of the figure is identical to the pose of Shiva, the Lord of Dance, created several thousand years later for worship as well as processions.



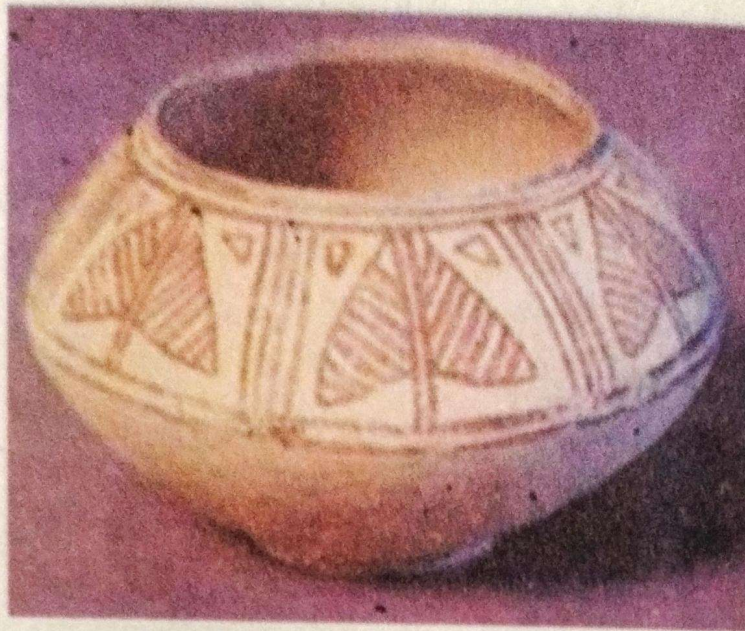
- NAME** : BULL SEAL
- MEDIUM** : WHITE STONE / STEATITE
- PERIOD** : CIRCA 2500 B.C.E.
- LOCATION** : MOHENJO-DARO
- SIZE** : 2.5 × 2.5 × 1.4 cm
- COLLECTION** : NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A low relief square seal of a humped bull with engravings on top in a pictographic script.

DESCRIPTION : This Zebu/Humped Bull seal is a fine example of animal study showing great strength and vigor of this bovine animal. Such detailing is a great artistic achievement at such an early date. It is a square seal engraved in a pictographic script. Although the iconography* cannot be properly identified, it is likely that this popular cattle-motif is related to the significance of the bull as a fertility and lunar symbol in ancient Mesopotamia. It could be the leader who stands for their protection and ensures breeding and reproduction or it could just be an animal used to sacrifice/offering to god by a powerful tribe.

The embossed body of the bull is strong with wide curved large horns and a dominant hump; the folds of skin hanging from the neck are incised realistically. The seal made in a low relief has all the bodily details from sharp horns to hardened hoofs carved thoroughly. This bull is perhaps a prototype of the Shiva's bull-Nandi.

Seals are another significant aspect of the Indus art and craft. They were produced mainly for commercial purposes. These are engraved in a 'pictographic script' often used as amulets (taveez), carried as modern day identity cards. Numerous square seals are found engraved with images of animals (bulls, rhinoceroses, elephants, etc.), fantastic beasts (unicorns) and human or divine figures. The seals were mostly made of steatite (soft stone found in rivers) with a loop for suspension on the opposite side covered with a mineral called natron and fired to obtain white surface.



NAME : PAINTED EARTHEN-WARE (JAR)
MEDIUM : TERRACOTTA
PERIOD : CIRCA 2500 B.C.E.
LOCATION : MOHENJODARO
COLLECTION : NATIONAL MUSEUM, NEW DELHI.

DESCRIPTION : A large amount of pottery found at Indus Valley sites helps us see how pottery designs changed over time. Most of the pottery was made on a wheel, with only a few pieces made by hand. Plain pottery, usually made of red clay, is more common than painted pottery. Some plain pieces have knobs on them. The black-painted pottery has a red coating underneath, with shiny black designs of shapes and animals. Polychrome pottery, which is rare, includes small vases with colourful geometric patterns in red, black and green. Incised pottery with designs carved into it, is also uncommon and is usually found on the lower part of bowls and ceremonial dishes. Some pottery has holes, likely used for straining drinks. There are many shapes and sizes of pottery for everyday use, mostly with graceful curves rather than straight edges. Miniature vessels, often less than half an inch tall, are especially well-made and impressive.

The jar shown here is shaped more like a round bottom bowl. Found in Mohenjodaro, it was made by a potter using a wheel and clay. The potter shaped the jar by using their hands to apply pressure. After it was baked in a fire to harden, the jar was painted black and polished to shine. The jar has designs with simple, identical plant shapes and geometric patterns in abstract style contained within three vertical lines. Horizontal lines gracefully encircle the rounded top and bottom of the pot, enhancing the overall design.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION OF ART
DURING MAURYAN, SHUNGA,
KUSHANA & GUPTA PERIOD

THE MAURYAS

The Mauryan period is an important period in the history of Indian art and architecture. The foundations for Indian art were laid, which later reached their height during the golden age of the Guptas. Ashoka, a mighty king who ruled during the 3rd century B.C.E., was the grandson of Emperor Chandragupta, the founder of the Maurya dynasty that covered a vast territory from Afghanistan in the northwest to South India. During his reign, the Mauryan Empire reached its peak.

Ashoka experienced a change of heart after the dreadful battle of Kalinga, where thousands lost their lives and were taken into slavery. After seeing the senseless bloodshed, he adopted the Buddhist path of righteous living and decided to spread Buddha's teachings of peace and non-violence far and wide.

Some of the finest examples of Mauryan art are the famous Ashoka pillars that he got built across the country. These columns are marvels of art, architecture as well as engineering. The pillar was made out of a single stone which was cut, shaped and polished. This required great engineering mastery that included carrying of large and heavy blocks of stone from quarries that were hundreds of miles away. In some cases, they even had to transport the stone to the hilltops.

There are close to twenty Ashokan pillars discovered so far. According to the noted art historian Vidya Dehejia, *"These finely polished pillars, were carved of a coloured sandstone from a single quarry at Chunar near the Mauryan capital of Pataliputra"*, now known as Patna, the capital of Bihar. *"The pillars were decorated on the top by a capital carved out of single piece of stone. The capital consisted of an inverted bell-shaped form finely carved like a lotus on which rested a thick disc called an abacus (elaborate base) over which perched a magnificent animal like the Sarnath Lions"*.

The pillar shafts were also made of a single piece of stone-measuring some nine metres/thirty feet in height. They had a smooth, polished surface and were pointed gradually towards the top. Pillars carry Ashoka's message of unity to the Buddhist monks. They were inscribed with the Buddhist concepts of morality, humanity and dedication, which he wished his people to follow.

Famous Ashokan pillars are from Lauriya Nandangarh in Bihar, Sanchi and Sarnath.

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NAME : LION CAPITAL FROM SARNATH
MEDIUM : POLISHED SANDSTONE
PERIOD : CIRCA 3rd CENTURY B.C.E.
DYNASTY : MAURYAS-ASHOKA
COLLECTION : SARNATH ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM, U.P.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A sculpture of four lions standing back to back on an elaborate base/abacus that includes other animals. It was adopted as the official Emblem of India in 1950.

DESCRIPTION : The Sarnath lion capital, the crowning piece of a monolithic Ashokan Pillar, was built in the 3rd century B.C.E. at the Deer Park in Sarnath, the outskirts of Varanasi. Here, Buddha had preached his first sermon after gaining enlightenment and set the wheel of law in motion—*Dharma Chakra Pravartana*.

The capital, made of polished sandstone is more than two meters

(7 ft) in height. It comprises of four roaring lions placed back to back on a round slab called abacus. The abacus is supported by a bell shaped-inverted-lotus base. On the side of the abacus are carved four animals—lion, elephant, bull and horse moving in a clockwise manner. These animals carved with great skill alternate with four smaller *dharmachakras* or wheels of law.

It is believed that the capital was originally crowned by a bigger 'Wheel of Dharma'—*dharmachakra*, with 24 spokes the broken pieces of which were found at the original site.

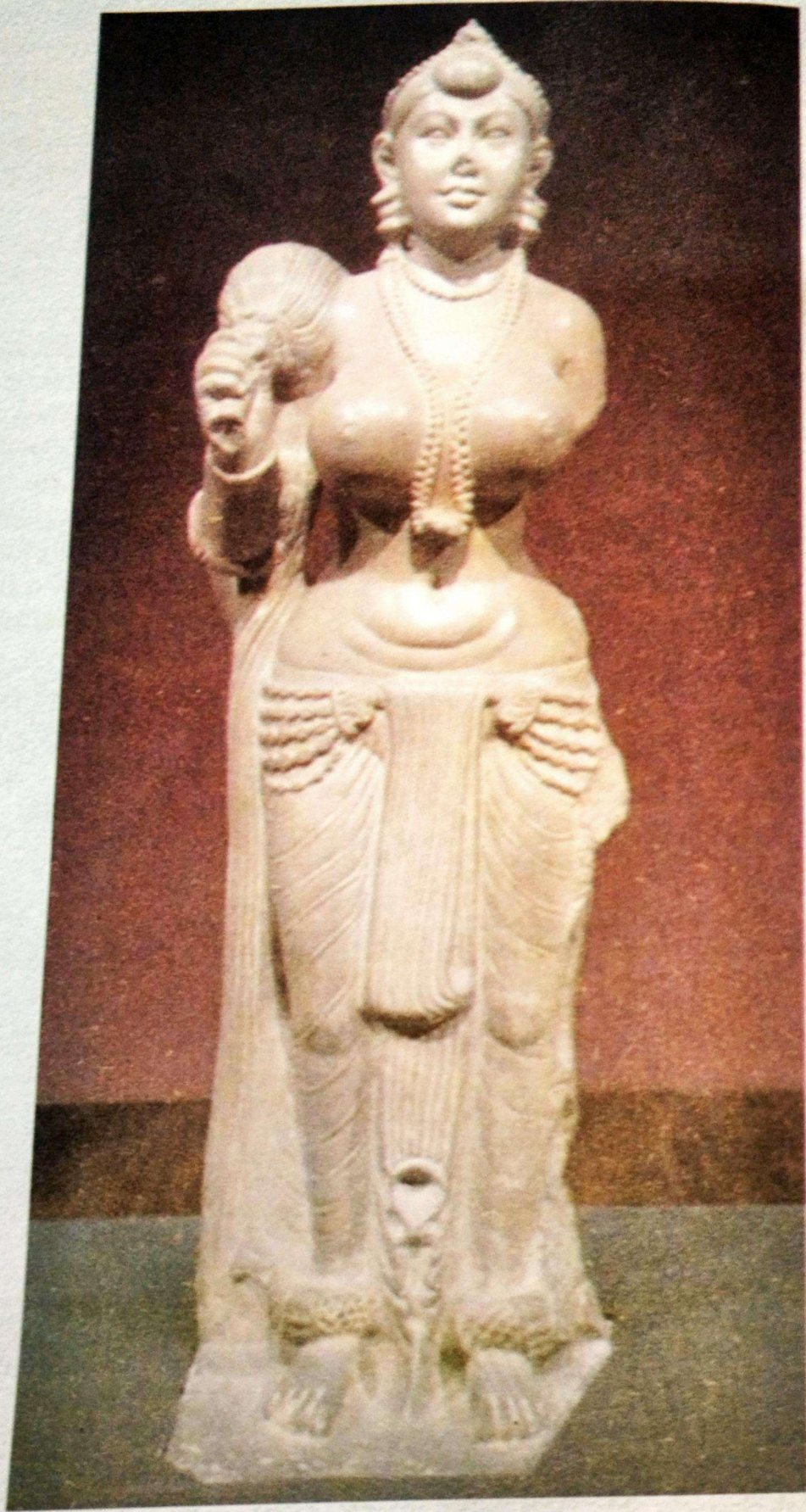
The four lions on top are highly symbolic and stylized with very little hint of naturalness. This is clear in the hair carved along the neck as little flame shaped bunches and the upper lip of the lions shown by three slit/cut lines. The magnificent modelling gives them a great power and dignity. Surprisingly, compared to the majesty of the lions, the animals on the round base (abacus) are done with great naturalistic energy and are defined carefully. Petals of the lotus have rhythmically cut/slit curves and contours. The surface of these pillars has a mirror like finish. It also reveals the aristocratic and international nature of Mauryan art.

The pillar bears the edict of Ashoka's warning as a ruler in Brahmi script "*No one shall cause division in the order of monks*". The broken pieces of the Pillar are now in the Museum at Sarnath.

The great symbolism of the greatest Buddhist virtues along with the great masterly skill of sculpting of this piece of art deserved to be a national identity of the great nation.

Symbolism : There are various interpretations regarding the symbolism. Two of them are as follows :

1. These four lions are the various forms of Buddha or Sakyasimha symbolizing power, courage, pride, and confidence. They are joined back to back facing the east, west, north and south signifying Ashoka's victory in all four directions. The smaller wheels on the abacus stand for his victory in the intermediate regions, reigning him supreme in the whole world. The four animals are believed to symbolize different aspects of Lord Buddha's life. The Elephant stands for the dream of Queen Maya in which a white elephant enters her womb. The Bull represents desire during the life of the Buddha as a prince. The Horse represents Buddha's departure from royal life. The Lion represents the achievement of enlightenment/nirvana. It also stands for his royal lineage as he belonged to the sakya clan. The *dharmachakra* spreads the continuous motivation to work for 24 hours and stand for the victory of righteousness over physical force.
2. The lion is frequently used as a symbol of the Buddha and the capital thus probably symbolizes the Buddha's spread of Dharma. The group of four lions and bell jointly symbolize preaching of 'the Four Noble Truths' of Buddhism to all. The symbol 'U' with a vertical line placed symmetrically inside the lotus symbolizes 'The Middle Path'. The Middle Path is the fundamental philosophy of Buddhism, the Buddhist Dharma. The bull, the horse, the Lion and the Elephant in the moving position could symbolize as rolling the *Chakra*—the wheel of law.



NAME : CHAURI BEARER FROM DIDAR GANJ
(YAKSHI)
MEDIUM : POLISHED SANDSTONE
PERIOD : CIRCA 3RD CENTURY B.C.E.
DYNASTY : MAURYAS
COLLECTION : PATNA MUSEUM, BIHAR

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : A life-size sculpture of a Yakshi holding a Chauri.

DESCRIPTION : The statues of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis*, the deities of fertility and abundance are excellent specimens of Mauryan craftsmanship in fashioning the human figure. The Yakshi from Patna Museum is a striking example of 3rd century B.C.E., created by a gifted sculptor.

The Didarganj Chauri-bearer is named so because it was excavated from Didarganj, an ancient locality of Patna in Bihar. It is a beautiful female figure carved out of a single piece of stone standing 64" (5 ft 4 inches) tall. This classic, life size sculpture was carved in the fine grained buff colored sandstone, delicately polished to a mirror like shine. Though massive and bold in its execution, this is a grand portrayal of the Indian ideal of feminine beauty. The careful attention to detail is visible in the notable bust, broad hips, narrow waist and the creases on lower abdomen. The figure is wearing elaborate jewellery in the neck, ears and a beaded *matha-patti* with a big round piece in the centre of hair partition at the forehead. There is a heavy garment below her waist draped elegantly with folds and pleats gathered in front. The pleats are neatly held in place by a beautiful and delicate jewel—*oddiyanam*. She holds a fly whisk (the *chauri*) in her left hand whose length falls till her foot from behind.

The most remarkable feature of the sculpture apart from the shiny polish is the peaceful and calm expression on her face. Her composure creates a powerful impact of rare and royal dignity. This beautiful Didarganj Chauri-bearer is a proud symbol of Indian artistic genius. It is considered the Mona Lisa of Indian Art because of "*the mysterious half smile on her lips*".

KUSHAN PERIOD : Gandhara and Mathura School

The Kushan dynasty reigned over the region covering present-day Afghanistan, north-west Pakistan and north-western India. The rise and growth of the Kushans as a political power lasted from 1st century A.D. / C.E. to the 3rd century C.E. Kanishka I, the third ruler of the Kushan dynasty developed the empire to its fullest extent. He was a great patron of the Buddhist religion and under him, Buddhist art production received a noteworthy motivation. Mathura and Gandhara were the two main centers of art during the time of the Kushans.

1. Expanse : The **Gandhara** School of Art often called the Greco-Roman-Buddhist school flourished in the 2nd century C.E. Gandhara, a broad region consisting of roughly northwestern India between the Khyber Pass and the Indus River around Peshawar and the region of Kabul Valley in Afghanistan. Works of Persian and Hellenistic (ancient Greek) influence were produced here.

Mathura region was mainly northern India where works in the Indian style were produced.

2. Buddha in Human Form : The Gandhara and Mathura School created the first representation of the Buddha in human form. According to Hinayana Buddhism, the making of Buddha idol in human form was prohibited. Therefore, he was represented using symbols like; the Chhatra, Bodhi Tree, Charan-Paduka (footwears), etc. to propagate his religion and his way of life. When Mahayana Buddhism came up during Kanishka's rule, the image of Lord Buddha in human form was created for the first time. These statues were mostly prepared at Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Taxila. There was a definite effect of Greek art on these statues. This whole area was known as Gandhara, hence this period and its art got this name.

Buddha of Mathura drew inspiration from Yaksha figures of Bharhut and Sanchi of earlier centuries. Other Hindu and Jain deities also began to be shown in human form in Mathura school.

3. Subject Matter : **Gandhara** school was also called as the **Eclectic** school because it had wide ranging influences of Greco-Roman-hellenistic techniques. The subject matter of Gandhara art was completely Buddhist, depicting the image of the Buddha and the legends associated with his life called Jataka tales. Though the subject matter of these statues is Indian but the style of making sculptures is Greek (hellenistic). Even the garments and ornaments are also not Indian.

Mathura school was also called the **indigenous** school because it evolved at its own native place as a redirected continuation of the old Indian art of Bharhut and Sanchi. The Mathura School drew inspiration from local folk

* B.C.E. stands for Before Common Era, and is used in the same way as B.C.
C.E. stands for Common Era, and is used in the same way as A.D.

deities and themes from day to day life. Unlike Gandhara where subjects are mainly Buddhist, In Mathura we see works on three religions :

1. Buddhism—Standing and seated poses of Buddha and Bodhisattvas,
2. Jainism—Thirthankaras and
3. Hinduism—Brahmanical Deities, Yakshas-Yakshis and god Kubera.

Many Portrait statues of Kushana Kings also were found. Mathura art had very little influence of Greco-Roman techniques.

4. Material : There are two phases in the development of **Gandhara** school: the first in stone and the second in stucco. The most frequently used material by Gandhara artists was soft local schist stone in light or dark gray with small sparkling mica particles. Many of these statues were also covered with gold leaf to give them a luster in dark interiors. In the later part, the sculptors from Gandhara used stucco (a mixture of lime and clay).

The material for making sculptures in **Mathura** is Spotted Red sandstone with white and yellow veins from the quarries of Sikri.

5. Portrayal of Buddha – Main features : Buddha in **Gandhara** is portrayed with the head of a Greek Apollo wearing a Roman Toga (loose garment). All early Bodhisattvas here are shown wearing turbans, jewellery, and muslin skirts, a costume that was an adaptation of the actual dress of the Kushan and Indian nobles. Also, more stress is given to the bodily features and external beauty. The human head usually appears with a perfect oval face and regular features. Eyes are almond-shaped and slightly bulging with gentle arching eyebrows, a straight nose, wavy hair, large forehead and ears. The lips are cut beautifully with a slight smile suggesting spiritual greatness. Unlike the monks who keep their heads shaven, Buddha as a monk was shown in a unique Ornamental hair style. He also had a moustache in a few sculptures. The Buddha represents calm meditation with half-closed eyes; seated in a Yogi Position. The postures are in pure Indian style of preaching in Dhyana Mudra, Abhaya Mudra etc. The signs of his supernatural powers—the large ears, *Urna*—the third eye on his forehead, and *Ushnisha*—the bulge on his head in the form of the “chignon” a knot or a roll of hair wrapped on Buddha’s head. This knot indicates that he hears all, sees all and knows all. The stretched ears indicate the heavy, rich jewellery the Buddha wore as a prince.

The Buddha image at **Mathura** is modelled on the lines of the earlier *Yaksha* images. He is surrounded by Bodhisattvas; Halo around the Buddha is decorated with geometrical motifs. We see a delighted Buddha sculpted according to the *lakshanas*. He has a shaven face and is generally seated in Padmasana with the right hand in Abhaya mudra and left on thigh. He has a muscular and energetic body in the clinging drapery. The typical *Urna* and *Ushnisha* depict his enlightenment. Buddha here commands respect. More stress is given to the inner beauty and facial emotions rather than bodily gestures.



NAME : SEATED BUDDHA FROM KATRA MOUND

MEDIUM : RED SPOTTED SANDSTONE

PERIOD : CIRCA 3rd CENTURY A.D. / C.E.

DYNASTY : KUSHAN PERIOD – MATHURA STYLE

COLLECTION : GOVT. MUSEUM, MATHURA, U.P.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : Buddha seated in padmasana with bodhisatvas on both sides.

DESCRIPTION : This Kushan sculpture height 27¼ inch (69 cm) was found in the Katra mound at Mathura.

Buddha has two crowned Bodhisatva attendants on both sides, Padamapani holding a *padam*-Lotus and Vajrapani holding a *Vajra*-Thunderbolt (earlier they were thought to be Indra and Brahma). He is dressed as a true Indian, in a transparent muslin garment-*Sangheti* that covers only one shoulder and is gathered in small stringed folds along the upper left arm. This feature of gathered, transparent textile, also seen on the two Bodhisatva figures is a distinctive characteristic of Mathura.

Buddha is seated as a yogi in *padmasana*-cross legged pose with soles turned upwards, on a lion throne under the Bodhi tree. The face has a smiling, friendly expression like all other Mathura Buddhas. The Buddha is backed by a large decorated halo carved on the edges and decorated with simple motifs. He is attended by heavenly beings called *gandharvas* placed diagonally above the halo bearing fly whisks. The *abhaya* mudra of the right hand and the other angled arm, resting on his left knee, gives an air of movement. There are no wavy impressions of hair on the head like most of the later Buddhas, only a snail shell like knot on the head *ushnisha*. Other lakshanas like *Urna* on the forehead between the eyebrows, the wheel on the palm and soles of the feet are clearly represented.

Mathura sculptures from this period have light volume but a fleshy body. The beauty in the flexibility of delicately carved curves and contours gives them an earthy look. The face is round with fleshy cheeks and shoulders are broad. The swell of the belly is sculpted with the quality of *prana* or inner breath in the figure.

The flying *gandharvas* give a spiritual importance to the sculpture. The lion throne has three lions carved in relief, the one in centre facing the front, and the two on sides facing away from each other. The details are minimal but the liveliness in this figure makes it unique. This sculpture is an excellent early example of an entirely Indian Buddha.

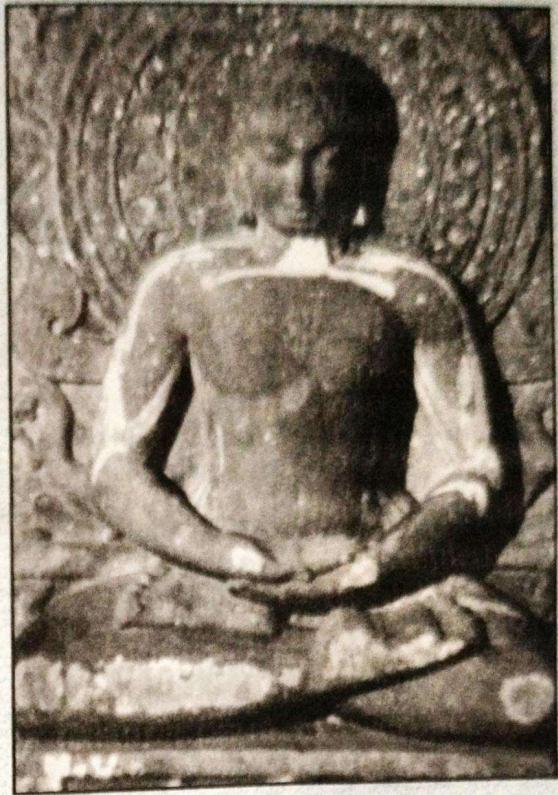
The earliest style at Mathura-Kushan ultimately led to the development of the supreme Buddha icon in the Gupta period.

GUPTA ART (C. 350-650 A.D. / C.E.)

The Golden age of Gupta began with the founder Sri Gupta. The Gupta dynasty controlled the whole Ganges valley from Ujjain to Orissa. It developed as a result of slow growth in the Indian style of Mathura and Gandhara and later rules of Satvahanas and Andhras. Different forms of art, e.g., sculpture, painting and terracotta achieved maturity and naturalness of expression that had remained unexcelled till date. Very few remains have survived after destruction caused by foreign invaders but statues that survived at the main centre of artistic activity in Mathura and Sarnath show the glory of Gupta art.

The sculptures include standing and seated figures of Buddhist, Jain and Hindu religions. The Gupta sculptural style grew out of the Kushan style that survived at Mathura. The garment '*Sangheti*', Buddha is wearing, has Gandharan influence but it has rhythmic parallel lines in string-like folds rather than a solid mass of Gandhara. At places it clings like a wet material showing only in hem lines at the ends. The features and body are completely Indian and Buddha images at Sarnath reflect dignity, calmness and contentment. Gupta images have delicate modelling and finer proportions with a calm and thoughtful expression on the face. He is a true monk with lowered eyelids and an aura of peacefulness. The Gupta sculptures stand for the superiority of spiritual powers over materialistic life. All statues of Gupta Buddhas have delicately carved halo in concentric bands which are outstanding. The body is given a slight bend, *bhanga*, making it look more real, natural and comfortable.

This practice of carving images was picked up by Hinduism and Jainism as well. There are Jain Tirthankaras and Brahmanical sculptures of various forms of Vishnu, Gandharva and Apsara reliefs, to name a few that had Gupta art at its best.



NAME : JAIN
TIRATHANKARA

MEDIUM : STONE
PERIOD : CIRCA 5TH
CENTURY A.D. / C.E.

DYNASTY : GUPTA

COLLECTION : STATE MUSEUM, LUCKNOW, U.P.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : Jain deity seated in padmasana.

DESCRIPTION : The main Jain deities consist of twenty-four Tirthankaras (or saviours), the first being Rishabhanatha and the last Mahavira. This image of Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankar found in Mathura is seated on a square pedestal in a meditative mood. This Statue of Jain Tirathankara in Dhyan Mudra with one hand at the top of the other is made in the Buddhist and Jain style of the Kushana period.

As taught by Lord Mahavira, *Tri-ratna*, the three gems of action which are *faith*, *righteous action* and *truthful words*, free a man from the circle of life and death. The artist has rightly expressed this in a life-sized, sensitively modelled sculpture with a gentle, peaceful expression beneath bow-shaped brows. The eyes are in deep meditation, the hair arranged in snail shell curls rising to an *ushnisha* complete this sculpture.

ART OF AJANTA

(Circa 2nd Century B.C./B.C.E.* to 480 or 650 A.D./C.E.)

INTRODUCTION

Ajanta is a great art treasure. Its caves are a fine example of rock-cut architecture. They contain some refined sculptures, and more importantly, paintings of matchless beauty. Infact, the bright history of Indian paintings starts from the wall paintings / Frescoes of Ajanta. The scholars believe that nowhere in the world such beautiful paintings were done during that period. That is why it is known as **the golden period** of Indian Art.

The followers of Lord Buddha constructed several Stupas, Chaityas and Viharas throughout India. The stories of past lives of Buddha, known as Jataka stories, were painted in Bhaja, Karle, Kanheri and Ajanta.

DISCOVERY

In 1817 C.E., some tiger hunting British soldiers first saw this collection of caves lying deserted in a horseshoe shaped narrow valley close to Aurangabad. On a fateful day this year, the art of Ajanta was exposed to the fascinated world.

LOCATION AND PERIOD

This holy pilgrimage of Indian paintings set like a huge amphitheatre is situated in the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra state. There is a small hill of about 300 feet height in a crescent moon formation or in a horse shoe formation with a stream flowing nearby. These are actually the temples of Art where we see the expressions of love, patience, worship, sacrifice, sympathy and peace in the form of architecture, sculpture and painting.

Ajanta is the only surviving example of painting in 2nd century B.C.E.

and 6th century A.D. / C.E. The exact time periods are not available due to the lack of dated inscriptions.

First Phase

Hinayana period (2nd – 1st centuries B.C.E.)

The earliest caves (Nos. 8, 9, 10, 13 & 15A) were painted / sculpted during the rule of the Satavahanas.

Second Phase

Mahayana period (4th – 6th centuries C.E.)

The second phase was of greater artistic activity at Ajanta and the remaining caves were painted / sculpted during the rule of the Vakataka dynasty from the 4th to the 6th centuries C.E.

The rulers, the Satavahanas, the Vakatakas and the Chalukyas, were themselves Hindus, but allowed Buddhism to prosper in their territory. The rich business community organised the guilds and provided the required funds. The entire Ajanta chapter is a tribute to the religious tolerance of the Hindu rulers. The art mastered during Gupta period bloomed yet again with its fullest charm.

NUMBER OF CAVES

Ajanta is a complex of **29** chaitya and vihara caves [+1 unfinished cave] that were chiseled into live rock and are host to some of the best preserved paintings and sculptures. Cave No. 1 (21 ft long) is the biggest cave which is home to the figure painting of Padmapani. Cave No. 29 is the best stupa cave. Cave No. 17 has the highest number of paintings.

TYPES OF CAVES

These caves are of two types :

- (1) **Chaitya or Stupa Caves** : These were the places of worship and religious discussion. Caves No. 9, 10, 19, 26 and 29 are Chaitya Caves.

- (2) **Vihara Caves or Living Caves** : They were the living places for Buddha Bhikshus. Cave No. 1 to 8, 11 to 18, then 20 to 28 and 30 are Vihara Caves.

TECHNIQUE OF AJANTA FRESCOES AND MURALS

The technique of Ajanta paintings is called Fresco-Secco. First, the surface was made rough to provide grip to the covering plaster. Then plaster was applied made of ground reddish-brown earth, rock powder, sand, vegetable fibres, paddy husk, and other organic fibrous material. A second layer of mud, ferruginous (reddish-brown) earth mixed with rock powder or sand and fine vegetable fibre was applied. After every layer of plaster, the surface was beaten with flat bamboo sticks. The surface was then treated with a thin coat of limewash over which lines were drawn with light colour. Natural pigments were used as colours in the frescoes.

COLOURS OF AJANTA

The pigments of colour came from local volcanic rock-shades of green and ochre resulting from weathering of basalt*, natural white colour was prepared from limestone or chalk, and blue from neel (indigo) plant. Later on, Lapiz Lazuli** was imported and ground for the blue pigment. Other colours were yellow, vermillion, terra verte or glauconite for green and red from red ruddle (a type of red stone powder). Some believed that the yellow colour might have been prepared from arsenic. The rest of the colours used in Ajanta paintings were a mixture of red, blue, yellow and white. Lamp black was the only organic colour. The colours were bonded with animal glue and vegetable gums. Figures were outlined in dull red with thin brush strokes. Local colours were applied with slight shading, usually with the highlights in the middle of the form and darker tones on the outside. This gave an effect of a shallow relief, occasionally seen in the case of jewellery.

* It is a dark coloured, fine grained igneous rock.

** It is a blue metamorphic rock used since ancient times by man.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FRESCOES AND MURALS

Mural is an artwork painted or applied directly on a wall or a ceiling. It becomes one with any architectural space no matter how big it is. **Fresco** on the other hand is one of the types of a mural in which painting is done on a wall treated with lime plaster either dry or wet. The color thus soaks into the surface and becomes one with it. Therefore, a fresco is a mural but a mural may or may not be a fresco.

SUBJECT MATTER OF AJANTA PAINTINGS

Ajanta caves are the picture books of Buddha's life and his teachings. Buddha's intelligence, noble character, selfless service and compassion are illustrated on these timeless walls with the help of Jataka tales—the previous births of Buddha. The artists were also aware of their times, as evident from the different aspects of life painted in Ajanta caves. The lonely life of village, luxury life of courts, beggar, fishermen, fighting soldiers, hunters, bull fight, birds and animals etc. are found in Ajanta Paintings. The whole religious and philosophical life has been depicted in the background of these figures.

According to the scholars, the paintings of Ajanta can be divided into three parts as regards to the subject matter. They are :

- (1) Ornamental
- (2) Emotional or expressive
- (3) Descriptive

The first category includes Animals, Birds, Flowers, Creepers, Giants, Divinities, Snakes, Gandharvas, Apsaras, Garuda and Yaksha. Buddha in different poses, his birth, death and spiritual events, Bodhisatvas, King and Queen, come under the second category. The third category consists of Jatakas and Avadanas—the stories and events of Buddha's life which are maximum in number.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AJANTA PAINTINGS

Ajanta Paintings became world famous due to the following characteristics :

1. **Linear beauty** : The line drawing of Ajanta is the most important aspect of the painting. Expression of emotion through lines is the specialty of the Ajanta paintings. The lines are powerful and flexible in nature. The lines are thick, forceful, full of energy at one place and thin, rhythmic at the other, according to the requirement. The pressure applied on the brush created the desired effect. Body colour was merged with the outer line, creating an effect of volume. The shades of the line also vary from Indian red to dark brown and then black.
2. **'Bhava'—the expression of sentiment** : The expression of bhava or mood is the soul of Ajanta art. For example, in Gaja Jataka story, the expression of feelings by animals has been depicted in the affectionate union of elephants. Other Human emotions like shyness, fear, sorrow, compassion, peace, merriment, humour, friendship, anger, hate, strain, beauty, worship, request and restlessness have been very successfully depicted in Ajanta art.
3. **Symbolic painting** : Elephants, lotuses, creepers and wild apples have been painted as the symbols of well being. It is believed that lord Buddha was an elephant in one of his past lives as described in Jataka stories.
4. **Body forms inspired by poetry and literary expressions** : The body forms used were theoretical, not naturalistic. The classical Indian artists did not paint what they saw, but used poetic equivalents. The parts of the body, were supposed to resemble, and be based on, similes / comparisons drawn from plant or animal life. Sensuous lips are ripe and full like the *bimba*—fruit; fingers likened to lotus-petals. The hands are supple like flower-bud; feet-like-leaves (*pada-pallava*). Thus the shoulders of a figure would resemble the brow of an elephant; the arms would curve like creepers; the eyes might be fish shaped and the lips like buds.

5. **Continuous narration like a story :** Most of these masterpieces appear to be a part of a continuous sequence of events where a story continues in episodes on the walls of these caves.
6. **Mathematical techniques for correct drawings :** The drawing skills used in the construction of forms, perspective, and composition were, surprisingly, strictly controlled by mathematical techniques. A few texts that describe them are still available and used today, in modified form, by Tibetan artists.
7. **Main figure larger than life :** For the sake of Dominance and Emphasis, the artists of Ajanta have increased the size of their main character, Buddha, in various scenes. *e.g.* The Mother and Child before the Buddha in Cave No. 17, Buddha is shown five times bigger than the normal figure.
8. **Women in ideal form :** Women of Ajanta are the art lover's delight. The Ajanta artist has painted the whole range of women characters: ladies of court and their maids, dancers, and common women doing their house-hold chores. The artist had succeeded in reproducing the soft roundness of her breasts, the curves of her hips, the turn of her head, the gestures of her hands and the slanting glance of her eyes. Mostly women are painted half nude, but there is not a spark of obscenity. Moreover, they look graceful, gracious and divine. Many heroines of Ajanta are dark complexioned. This suggests that ancient India valued and celebrated diversity in skin colours, including darker tones as symbols of beauty and elegance.
9. **Decoration of ceilings :** The ceilings of Ajanta caves are also very beautifully decorated. Animals, birds, lotus, gods and goddesses have been used in the lively decoration in spite of the limited means available to the artists.
10. **Colour scheme :** The use of limited colours in creating a different colour scheme is a distinctive feature of Ajanta paintings. The whole painting has been done with *geru* (ruddle), *neel* (blue colour), yellow ruddle, and chalk and lime (white colour). It may also be observed

that various skin colours are used in the paintings such as brown, yellowish brown, greenish, yellow ochre, etc. representing a multi coloured population. Thick and dark lines in Brown colour are used at curves and outlines. The brightness of colour is retained after about 2000 years.

11. **Variety of life** : Divine to ordinary, royal to humble, all levels of society have been nicely depicted. Different aspects of life like drinking, playing, sleeping, make up etc. have been painted. Flying apsaras and gandharvas are good examples of super / human life.
12. **Hair styles** : The Ajanta paintings show a great variety of *dhammilas* (hair styles) from the simplest to the most sophisticated. Short hair, different types of buns, long hair hanging down on the backs are decorated with pearl strands and diverse gold jewellery. Out of hundreds, no two women have been shown with a similar hairstyle.
13. **Battle scenes** : On one side Ajanta artists have depicted the delicate sentiments of relaxation, preaching and pity and on the other hand, crude battle scenes have been depicted with same success. There is a battle scene in Cave No. 17 in which 300 faces can be seen with different war moods. In Cave No. 1 a bull fight is depicted very lively.
14. **Illusion of depth** : Illusion of depth is achieved by drawing lines to follow contours of the body and by painting dots with variations in the concentration of dots. They have also executed tonal variation and avoided hard lines to create the desired volume.
15. **Emotional depiction of birds and animals** : Nowhere else in the world has ever been found such a beautiful depiction of birds and animals. Animals like horse, bull, deer, monkey and lion etc. have been painted life-like. Peacock, ducks, geese etc. are among the birds painted there. In a mural in Cave 10, some 50 elephants are painted in different poses bringing out the skill of the artist in handling these bulky forms in all perspective views, with erected tails & raised trunks, depicting a sensed danger.

16. **Portrayal of nature** : Different types of trees like banana, peepal, mango, banyan and palm have been painted in a rare artistic form. Trees, creepers, though painted with limited colours show the artists' skills. The depiction of nature in landscape makes them real and full of life.

17. **Garments and ornaments** : Ajanta is a treasure-house to study contemporary fashion in textiles, jewellery, etc. One can understand the trend of that time by seeing the garments painted here. The imagination of the artists in creating novel designs of ornaments and garments is praise / worthy. No two figures can be found wearing the same design of ornaments. Women wore ear and finger rings, bangles, armlets, anklets, necklaces, belts, tiaras and head gears of various patterns that can challenge the goldsmiths of today. Mostly figures are wearing clothes up to the belt but there is a wide variety in them. Mostly these clothes have been painted with lines and stripes.



- NAME** : **BODHISATVA PADAMPANI**
- MEDIUM** : FRESCO (MURAL PAINTING)
- PERIOD** : CIRCA 5TH CENTURY A.D. / C.E.
- DYNASTY** : VAKATAKAS
- LOCATION** : AJANTA CAVES, (CAVE No. 1) AURANGABAD,
MAHARASHTRA
- COURTESY** : ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : Painting of Bodhisatva's torso in a sublime pose.

DESCRIPTION : This painting in Cave No. 1 shows a Bodhisatva who will soon become Buddha. Bodhisatva here is standing in an attractive *Tribhanga* pose with a blue lotus-*padam* in one hand. The other hand extended in space, is creating a sense of movement. The elegant features, high forehead and elongated eyes looking downwards give an impression of dignity and calm meditation. Eyebrows are joined at the centre. He has broad shoulders modelled softly with a merging outline giving volume to the body and creating a three-dimensional effect. The torso is round with delicate and rhythmic lines to define the curves. There are highlights on cheeks, sharp nose and chin, as well as on the arms and breast. Jewellery indicates his royal birth. He wears a pearl necklace and a big intricate crown made with sapphire. The long string diagonally worn over the left shoulder, across the chest and falling below the right arm is shown with fine spiral lines. The beads from the centre of his necklace are bigger and decrease in size towards the neck. His left arm has a ribbon tied above the elbow. The cloth around the hip resembles a dhoti of striped silk worn in an ascetic style.

Colors are warm and earthy. Light red, brown, green and blue colours are used. Inward shading of the outline gives fullness to the Bodhisatva's appearance. Surrounding him in smaller, less important depictions are: his disappointed wife standing by his side touching her heart, Mara demon attacking, playful monkeys, birds and a *kinnara* (a mythological creature half human-half bird). Despite all this unrest around him, he is detached.

The Bodhisatva is depicted as an enlightened being who is about to achieve final nirvana. Filled with *karuna* (kindness and care), he looks at the world of suffering and rebirth (*samsara*) and on all the beings who suffer in it. On his journey to nirvana he is presented as a faithful and adorable being whose goal is to comfort and calm all beings.



NAME : MARA VIJAY
MEDIUM : STONE (HIGH RELIEF SCULPTURE)
PERIOD : CIRCA 5TH CENTURY A.D. / C.E.
DYNASTY : VAKATAKAS
LOCATION : AJANTA CAVES, (CAVE No. 26) AURANGABAD,
MAHARASHTRA
COURTESY : ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA.

THEME / SUBJECT MATTER : This sculpture in Chaitya hall Cave No. 26 shows Mara and his armies, the personifications / representations of doubts and desires that distracted Buddha from time to time. Mara Vijay means victory over the god of lust, depicting the confusion in Buddha's mind on the journey to salvation.

DESCRIPTION : The panel shows the story / narrative with the image of Buddha in the centre surrounded by Mara's army along with his daughters. Buddha is shown pointing towards earth as a witness to his generosity with his right hand. Mara on an elephant accompanied by his demon force including some with animal faces is attacking Buddha from his right. In the foreground, the daughters of Mara are trying to tempt Buddha by dance and music. The dancing figures at the lower base with the musicians have a bulging waist, and one of the dancing figures has spread out her hands in a dancing posture. On the left lower end, the image of Mara is shown thinking as to how to disturb Gautama before enlightenment. The army of Mara is shown marching towards Buddha in the first half of the panel whereas the lower half of the panel shows the withdrawing army of defeated Mara. The centrally placed Buddha is in *padmasana* and a tree at the back is shown with the help of dense leaves.

This relief sculpture panel has all energetic and voluminous figures in its complex composition. All events show dynamic movement. The Ajanta artists were masters in portraying feminine emotions and grace. The female figures are depicted in different postures and gestures of frustration and guilt.

This is the largest sculptural panel at Ajanta. This is a story of the victory on all the temptations of the material world by Buddha during his meditation. Buddha remained unshaken and won over all the armies of Mara.