OVA-003

An Introduction to Indian Art

Indian Sculpture
“Education is a liberating force, and in our age it is also a democratising force, cutting across the barriers of caste and class, smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other circumstances.”

- Indira Gandhi
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BLOCK 2 INTRODUCTION

This Block relates to the understanding of Indian sculpture of historical times. India has a rich heritage of sculpture from the Indus period to the Vijayanagar period. The different styles in sculpture are created by the dynasty which ruled at the time of the creation of that class of sculpture. Iconography and different features are associated with the sculpture. Since it is a very vast field of study only representational examples are considered here.

The first unit (1) in this Block discusses in detail the sculptures of the Indus valley period, their features and contents.

The second unit (2) is a study of the Mauryan sculptures, the usage of stone carving, the masterpieces of this style.

The third unit (3) in this Block studies the three major Buddhist schools of sculpture - Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati with interesting features and examples.

The fourth unit (4) in this Block is a study on the sculpture produced during the Gupta age, considered as the classical era of Indian sculpture. Masterpiece and features will be studied.
UNIT 1 SCULPTURES – INDUS PERIOD

Structure
1.1 Introduction
1.2 Objectives
1.3 The Indus Valley Civilization - Background
1.4 Sculptural Art
   Engraving - Seals
   Rounded Sculptures
1.5 Stylistic Features
1.6 Representational Examples
1.7 Summary
1.8 Self-Assessment Questions
1.9 Terminal Questions.
1.10 Answers to Terminal Questions

1.1 INTRODUCTION
In the previous unit you have studied the different techniques followed by Indian sculptors during historical times. In every period the sculptures are created in different styles. This shows the artistic achievements of the respective period. In this unit we shall discuss the sculpture as developed in the Indus Valley civilization.

1.2 OBJECTIVES
After reading this unit you will be able to:
• describe the Indus civilization and the sculptures of the period;
• discuss about the subjects chosen for sculptures;
• explain the types of sculptures; and
• discuss about the trends and approaches in sculpture of Indus period.

1.3 INDUS VALLEY CIVILIZATION – BACKGROUND
The Indus Valley civilization, which flourished from 3000 BC, marked the beginning of a great civilization in the sub-continent. It was situated on the banks of the Indus and Saraswati rivers and their tributaries initially. Later it extended into Ganges-Yamuna Doab region and also into Afghanistan. Among the settlements were the major urban centres of Harappa and Mohenjodaro located in Pakistan, Lothal, Rangpur, Surkothada, Kalibangan, Rakhigarhi, Dholavira, Daimabad, Kunal and many other places located in India. The famous archaeologists who have discovered many of these sites and conducting research on various aspects are John Marshall, B.B. Lal, S.R. Rao, Bhist, and others. These scholars are of the opinion that most of these centres were flourishing ports having internal trade by boats on the rivers. They extended trade with other civilizations such as Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian by land routes. The Indus-
Saraswati civilization has not disappeared. Due to floods and climatic changes people migrated and continued to settle in different places in historical times. The use and techniques of seals, writing, terracotta art and bead-making continued for centuries. Thus the Indus period remains as a source for Indian material culture.

**Salient Features:**

The salient feature of the Indus period is its urban planning. A well-planned city with neatly laid roads, pavements, underground drainage system, rows of houses, a centrally located palace, administrative setups, dockyard (Lothal), Great Baths (Harappa and Mohenjodaro) Granary (Harappa). The houses were of different sizes having bathrooms and toilets. Good lighting was provided in the houses and space was provided for all kinds of activities. This is one of the greatest achievements of India which was not found in other civilizations.

The Indus Valley was known for its variety in pottery. The pottery was generally made on the potter’s wheel. It was painted in red and black colours. Some of them were glazed and incised. The domestic vessels were made of clay and had different shapes and forms. Vessels of copper, bronze, silver and porcelain were also known to Indus people.

The Indus people used various weapons like axes, spears, daggers, slings, etc. other than household implements and agricultural implements. Since they used boats for trading they knew the skills of making strong boats. They knew the use of gold, silver, copper, tin and lead. The other materials used by the people were bones, shells and ivory and faience. Ornaments were popular both among men and women. They used necklaces, fillets, armlets, finger rings, where as women used to be fond of girdles (ornament for waist), ear-studs, anklets, bangles etc. They used combs and cosmetics.

### 1.4 ART OF SCULPTURE

The Indus art of sculpture consists of two types of carving. One is engraving in low relief and the other type is rounded. The engravings in low relief are basically found in the form of seals.

**Seals**

The most distinctive object of the Indus Civilization is the seal. The total number of seals recovered by archaeologist is 3200. These seals were used for the purpose of trade. Different animals, human figurines and some kind of writing are engraved on these seals. With the discovery of a large number of seals, it is clear that the Indus people used writing with alphabets and ideas. Scholars are researching to decipher the script. Once the script is known, many misconceptions will be cleared. Also these seals are the earliest record of the Indian script. The seals are of different sizes and shapes such as rectangular, square, triangular, round, semi-circular. They are made of different materials such as clay, terracotta, soft stone and faience.

**Rounded sculptures**

A large portion of the art objects excavated in the Indus sites are made of terracotta. Some of the stone and bronze figures are very artistic and significant to study the early art of India. The subjects depicted and the techniques used have become the primary sources for studying Indian art. The terracotta figurines are small in size and they were used as votive offerings. Animal and human figures were made by different techniques such as hand modelled, wheel turned, appliqué method (creating a motif and then sticking
on the main object) and creating a figure by joining separate parts of the body. The clay used is generally the ordinary clay, burnt to terracotta. This created different natural pink colours and smooth surface. Some of the objects are delicate and show high sophistication. The objects recovered from Mohenjodaro – display higher degree of sophistication.

The type of stone used for sculpture is the jasper variety of red and black shades. The bronze sculptures are few in number but display a technique of high degree. They followed the lost-wax method. This technique is discussed in detail in Paper II under the chapter Sculpture Block-5 and unit 3 Another group of figures are probably toys, because these are small in size and wheels are attached to them. Animals, birds and carts belong to this category. Since the size of the sculptures and seals are small in size, they must have used tiny implements to carve them. This shows the dexterity in which the artists must have created their works of art.

1.5 STYLISTIC FEATURES

The element of style in art is an important factor to know the changing trends of culture. The Indus seals and sculptures are highly stylistic in character. The art objects involved items of daily use, such as pottery and jewellery, which were used in urban and rural areas. There are references to cross-cultural influences of other civilizations.

- In the Indus valley the regional diversity is seen through the art objects available in different regions, but a variety of sculptures, jewellery, seals are found in Harappa which shows that there was a demand for art objects in cities. The art soon reached a standard of urban sophistication.

- The objects coming from Harappa and Mohenjodaro are of the elite type and are considered as Metropolitan style. Regional sites like Lothal, Kalibangan, and other places created art objects with the locally available materials. The change in the use of material resulted in changes in size and designs.

- The Indus art has the basic feature of simplicity when compared to the complicated process of later Indian art styles. The animal and human figurines are well modelled in stone, terracotta and bronze with naturalistic treatment of body elements.

- Another important stylistic feature of the Indus period is that the objects are well defined whether it is the human figure or a tree represented on the seals. The figures are small and ritualistic in purpose.

- The animals are portrayed in an advanced technique in profile, seen turned rather than frontal. This shows the naturalistic treatment of figures. The animal figures are expressive and show natural strength and vigour. The animal figures include bull, dog, horse, ram, pig, rhino and monkey. The representation of bull is found on seals and in sculptures. In whatever they created, they had specific purpose. The figures were made according to the requirements of the taste of Indus people.

1.6 REPRESENTATIONAL EXAMPLES

Types of seals

A variety of subjects were engraved on seals such as animal and human motifs, mythical animals, animal deities, deities in human form and other mythological figures. Of these, a few examples are discussed here.
Indian Sculpture – Major Schools

Bull seals – Bull seals are very artistic and a realistic representation of the animal. Brahmani, a type of bull with big hump, long horns and robust dewlap is depicted on the seals in a prominent way along with script. Seals showing short horned bulls with a feeding turf with engraved script are found in large numbers.

Elephant seals – These seals are found in Harappa and Lothal. Elephants are drawn with proportionate parts of the body and size fitting in the size of a seal. These also bear the alphabets of Indus period.

Tiger seals – Tiger is shown on the seals in different moods and the depiction is realistic. Probably a section of people in Indus considered the tiger as a deity. In some seals a human being is associated with the tiger. The tigers are depicted with or without horns. In some, two tigers are shown with a human being.

Composite animal and human motifs – Several seals have composite figures which have been identified as unicorn with the body part of bull and horse, tree motifs. A clear script is provided as the background in the seal.

Pashupati seal – The Pashupati seal is one of the most beautiful, artistic and important seals among the excavated seals. This comes from Mohenjodaro showing a yogi with curved horned crown resembling the trishula is seated in clear Padmasana, the lotus posture. He is surrounded by animals like rhinos, elephant, tiger, dear and others. On the top the script is engraved in curved motifs including a human form. This is a highly sophisticated seal of this phase, and interpreted as the Lord of animals.

All these examples give us a feeling that in the Indus period the humans respected the animals and nature. The carvings on the seals display this intimate relationship. The figures on the seals were engraved with precision and clarity. They are fine specimens for studying the importance of seals in trade and transactions which has relevance for present times as well.

Sculptures:

Animals like bull, rhino, dog, horse, ram, monkey, birds, images of mother goddess, other female figures, male figures, bust of priest-king, male torso, male heads, masks, figures in yogi postures, chariots carts, bronze dancing girl are some of the important sculptures excavated in different sites of Indus-Saraswati valley.

Bull: Of all the animals depicted in terracotta, the bull is often rendered faithfully and artistically. There are examples of humped long horn, and humpless short horn bulls depicted in the sculptures. This indicates that these types of bulls existed in the whole of western India up to Baluchisthan. The artists might have carefully observed the anatomy and studied animal behaviour. This is evident from the moods and postures captured by them in some of the examples. A bronze bull from Kalibangan displays plasticity in metal art. Later in art traditions too bull becomes the vehicle of Shiva and is placed at the entrance of the temple. We also get to see only heads of bulls and also disjointed figures with moving heads.

Dog: Representation of dog in terracotta and copper and bronze are numerous like cattle sculptures. They are an interesting class and gain importance only in the Indus civilization. Probably they were pets because they are found with straps around the neck and in one or two cases they are tied around a pole. On the basis of erect tail and out-stretched tongue it is considered that they belong to the Pariah family. It shows that the artists were careful in portraying the species of dogs. By observing the large variety of dogs it appears that Indus people gave great importance to animals in their lives.
**Rhinoceros:** The figure of the Rhino from Lothal is realistic and probably done in multiple piece method (making the parts separately and then attaching them with binding). Sturdy body, short and thick legs, single horn, nail marked mouth are interesting features in this sculpture.

Other than these, the figures of ram, monkey and birds are artistically modelled.

**Mother Goddess:** Mother worship in India has a long and unbroken tradition. One of the strengths of Indian culture is the adoration of the mother. The agricultural society revered the earth as mother. A large number of terracotta figurines have been found in Harappa and Mohenjodaro with characteristic features like figures in standing posture with legs apart adorned with an elaborate girdle, a loin cloth, necklaces of different types and fan-shaped headdress. This is evidence that this cult flourished in the Indus Valley and continued in later periods of Indian history.

**The Mother Goddess** is still the guardian of the house and village in India presiding over child birth and daily needs. The Gram Devata (tutelary deity of every village) tradition is very much part of the present day life in towns and villages of India. Several manifestations are associated with the Gram Devata concept. The presence of Mother Goddess sculptures in all the phases of Indus civilization makes it clear that the Mother Goddess was a popular cult of the Indus valley culture but not in the southern and eastern provinces of the Indus Empire. The mother goddess figures are numerous at Harappa and Mohenjodaro but absent in Kalibangan, Lothal, Surkotada and Dholavira.

**Legless figures:** Another category of figurines discovered from Harappa are legless and seem to be functional as they can be placed more securely than the images of slender legs. They are representations of another class of the Mother-Goddess. Some scholars are of the view that these legless types are the representations of Earth Goddess, in which she is portrayed as half emerging from the ground.

**Other Female Figures:** There are good examples of female figures carrying children, or lying on beds or in a state of pregnancy. A striking example of a female figure with pot-belly suckling two babies from Harappa is moulded on the wheel. Some female figures portrayed doing household chores such as grinding the grain and kneading the dough from Harappa are hand modelled in baked clay. These figures are well-attended by the artists by adding suitable decorations in the form of costume and jewellery. The female figurines in particular represent the fertility cults and are associated with the worship of the mother goddess.

**Bronze Image of Dancing Girl or a Woman of Royalty:** This figure is a good example of remarkable achievement of the Indus artist in metal art. It was found from in Mohenjodaro and measures 4" in height. The large eyes, flat nose and bunched curly hair all featured in an artistic way. The heavy armlets and the forearm covered with bangles match with the neck ornament. Her posture is well-defined. Though it is a small figure, it is very impressive.

**Bust of the Priest-king:** This is the most outstanding male figure in bust of a bearded man found in Mohenjodaro. This figure has been evaluated and re-evaluated many times since its discovery, but it stills a mystery. Its artistic heritage is not easy to determine. The formality, the short beard and brushed back hair, the use of inlay and the trefoil motif are the characteristic of this sculpture. It is shown in the attitude of *yoga*, with the thick neck and contemplative mood. This male bust of Priest\king\deity is stylistically and conceptually clearly an Indian creation.
Indian Sculpture - Major Schools

**Male Torso:** Two small male torso figures without heads made of grey limestone from Harappa are outstanding for the technique adopted in their creation. One of them is an image with a twisted torso readily identifiable as a dancing figure created by the mature hand of an artist. Another small figure of a male torso in red limestone from Harappa has a monumentality which suggests life-size or even larger, is realistic and may be considered as the prototype for the Yaksha images of the Shunga period.

**A series of figures in Yogasana:** Ten identical figures have been excavated from Harappa. They are of different sizes and postures. The commonality is that they are into physical exercises and some of them appear contemplative with *namaskara mudra*, the folded hands. When they are placed in a sequence they display an early reference to the yoga *asanas*. These figures are handmade and feature in appliqué method.

The most favourite material for creating art objects during the various phases of Indus valley civilization is terracotta. The terracotta art in the Indian subcontinent goes back to a very early period of human history. Even today it continues to be an appealing media to Indian artists. The quantity and quality of specimens formed at many of the sites of the Indus valley culture are remarkable.

1.7 **SUMMARY**

In this unit you have studied the importance of artistic heritage of the Indus period, the extent of this civilization, and the scholars who discovered the world famous sites. If this discovery had not taken place we would not have been sure of the sources of Indian culture.

We also covered the contributions of this civilization to the world towards town planning, the dockyard, the trade and the economic activities in this period.

In the stylistic features of the sculptures we have seen how clay was used for creating sculptures in the most artistic ways. Here we also explored about the artistic abilities of the Indus artists in making bronze and stone sculptures.

Two categories of sculptures, the first known as engravings in the form of seals which were not just trade documents but important to know the religion, script and artistic abilities in carving and bringing fine relief were also discussed.

Under the sculptures we have covered stone, terracotta, bronze figures of greater significance to Indian art and culture. The origin of mother cult is traced back to Indus period.

1.8 **SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

**Self Assessment Questions 1**

Match the following:

a) Objects from Mohenjodaro display i) cult of Indus Valley culture
b) Composite figures are identified ii) higher degree of sophistication.
c) The figures are small iii) as source for Indian material culture
d) Indus period remains iv) ritualistic in purpose
e) Mother Goddess was a popular v) as unicorn
Self Assessment Questions 2

State whether true or false:

a) In Indus valley the regional diversity is not seen through the art objects.
b) The change in the use of material results changes in size and designs.
c) The animal figures are expressive and show the natural strength and vigour.
d) The representation of bull is not found at all on seals and in sculptures.
e) Indus art has the basic feature of simplicity.

Self Assessment Questions 3

Fill in the blanks by selecting the words given below:

i) intimate relationship, b) background in, c) Pashupati, d) Brahmani, e) tiger as a deity.

a) ____________ a type of bull with big hump, long horns and robust dewlap depicted on the seals.
b) Probably the section of people in Indus must have considered ____________
c) Clear script is provided as the seal.
d) ____________ comes from Mohenjodaro showing a yogi with curved horned crown.
e) The carvings on the seals display between humans and animals:

1.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. State the significance of Indus art in knowing about the early phase of Indian culture.
2. Explain the use of seals in the Indus period.
3. Write a note on three sculptures of the Indus period.
4. What are the stylistic features of Indus sculptural art?

1.10 ANSWERS

Self Assessment Questions 1

a) - ii, b) - v, c) - iv, d) - iii, e) - i.

Self Assessment Questions 2

a) F, b) T, c) T, d) F, e) T

Self Assessment Questions 3

a) Brahmani b) tiger as a deity c) background in d) Pashupati e) intimate relationship

Answers to Terminal Questions

1. The Indus valley period is the greatest chapter in Indian history. Indus sites are more than 3000 in number. Most of these centres were flourishing ports having internal
trade by boats on the rivers. They extended trade with other civilizations such as Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian by land routes. The Indus-Saraswati civilization has not disappeared. Due to floods and climatic changes people migrated and continued to settle in different places in historical times. The use and techniques of seals, writing, and terracotta art and bead-making continued for centuries. Thus the Indus period remains as source for Indian material culture. The important feature of the Indus period is its urban planning. A well-planned city existed with neatly laid roads, pavements, underground drainage system, rows of houses, centrally located palace, administrative set ups, dockyard (Lothal), Great Baths (Harappa and Mohenjodaro) Granary (Harappa). The houses were of different sizes having bathrooms and toilets. Good lighting was provided in the houses and space was provided for all kinds of activities. This is one of the greatest achievements of India which was not found in other civilizations. The seals of the Indus valley show the script used in that period. They also throw light on the economy, trade and the early traces of Indian religion. The Mother Goddess figures indicate the reverence given to the mother and earth.

2. Use of seals: The most distinctive object of the Indus Civilization is the seal. The total number of seals available is 3200. These seals were used for the purpose of trade. Different animals, human figurines and some kind of writing are engraved on these seals. With the discovery of the large number of seals it is clear that the Indus people used writing with alphabets and ideas. Scholars are researching to decipher the script. Once the script is known, many misconceptions will be cleared. Also these seals are the earliest record of Indian script. The seals are of different sizes and shapes such as rectangular, square, triangular, round, semi-circular. They are made of different materials such as clay, terracotta, soft stone and faience.

3. Note on sculptures:

1. **Mother goddess**: Mother worship in India has a long and unbroken tradition. One of the strengths of Indian culture is the adoration of the mother. The agricultural society revered the earth as mother. A large number of terracotta figurines have been found in Harappa and Mohenjodaro with characteristic features like figures in standing posture with legs apart adorned with an elaborate girdle, a loin cloth, necklaces of different types and fan-shaped headdress. Therefore it is the evidence that this cult flourished in the Indus Valley and continued in later periods of Indian history.

2. **Bronze Image of Dancing Girl or a Woman of Royalty**: This figure is a good example of the remarkable achievement of the Indus artist in metal art. It was found from Mohenjodaro, and measures 4". The large eyes, flat nose and bunched curly hair all featured in an artistic way. The heavy armlets and the forearm covered with bangles match with the neck ornament. Her posture is well-defined. Though it is a small figure, it is very impressive.

3. **Bust of the Priest-king**: This is the most outstanding male figure found in Mohenjodaro. This figure has been evaluated and re-evaluated many times since its discovery, but it still a mystery. Its artistic heritage is not easy to determine. The formality, the short beard and brushed back hair, the use of inlay and the trefoil motif are the characteristic of this sculpture. It is shown in the attitude of yoga, with the thick neck and contemplative mood. This male bust of Priest-king deity is stylistically and conceptually clearly an Indian creation.

4. **Stylistic features of Indus art**: The element of style in art is an important factor to know the changing trends of culture. The Indus seals and sculptures are highly
stylistic in character. There are references to cross-cultural influences of other civilizations.

In the Indus valley the regional diversity is seen through the art objects available in different regions. But a variety of sculptures, jewellery, seals are found in Harappa which shows that there was a demand for art objects in cities. The art soon reached a standard of urban sophistication.

The objects from Harappa and Mohenjodaro are of the elite type and objects of other places were created with the locally available materials. The change in the use of material resulted in changes in size and designs. Indus art has the basic feature of simplicity. The animal and human figurines are well modelled in stone, terracotta and bronze with naturalistic treatment of body elements.

Another important stylistic feature of the Indus period is that the objects are well defined whether it be a human figure or a tree represented on the seals. The figures are small and ritualistic in purpose. The animals are portrayed in an advanced technique in profile, seen turned rather than frontal. This shows the naturalistic treatment of figures. The animal figures are expressive and show a natural strength and vigour.

### Indus Sculptures

01. Relief on Seal – Brahmani Bull, terracotta, observe the script, Indus

02. Relief on Seal – Bull with short horn, terracotta, observe the script, Indus
Indian Sculpture - Major Schools

trade by boats on the rivers. They extended trade with other civilizations such as Egyptian,
Mesopotamian, and Indus by land routes. The Indus-Saraswati civilization has not

03. Relief on Seal – Elephant Seal – terracotta, observe the script, Indus

04. Relief on Seal – Pashupati terracotta, Indus

05. Relief on Seal – Unicorn, terracotta Ind
06. Relief on Seal – human figures, Indus

07. Relief on seal – tiger under the tree, Indus
Indian Sculpture – Major Schools

08. Bull – terracotta, Indus

09. Bull – bronze, Indus
10. Bull with moving head – terracotta, Indus

11. Dog – copper, Indus

12. Dog – Terracotta, Indus
Indian Sculpture – Major Schools

13. Horse – Terracotta, Indus

14. Rhino Head – Terracotta, Indus

15. Monkey – Terracotta, Indus
16. Ram and deer - Terracotta and metal Indus

17. Bird - terracotta, Indus
18. Bird with wheel - terracotta, Indus

19. Mother goddess – terracotta, Indus
20. Mother Goddess – terracotta Indus

21. Dancing girl – bronze, Indus
22. Priest head – stone, Indus

23. Human torso – stone, Indus
24. Yogasana postures – terracotta, Indus

25. Human figure and a cart – terracotta, Indus

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UNIT 2  SCULPTURES – MAURYAN SCHOOL

Structure

2.1 Introduction

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2.3 Mauryan Period - Background

2.4 Sculptural art
   Relief
   Rounded Sculptures

2.5 Stylistic Features

2.6 Representational Examples

2.7 Summary

2.8 Self-Assessment Questions

2.9 Terminal Questions

2.10 Answers to Terminal Questions

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have studied the early phase of Indian sculpture during Indus valley period. The striking feature was the astonishing varieties in the subjects of depiction and techniques followed by Indus sculptors. In this unit we will see how the sculptural art in India for the first time takes a new proportion. The use of stone in Mauryan period opens up gates of imagination of stone carvers in India. We will study the salient features of the sculptures in this period along with few masterpieces of art.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:

• understand a brief background of Mauryan period which made the beginning of Indian recorded history;

• information about the early Buddhist art and the subjects chosen for sculptures;

• know the fine techniques adopted in stone carving; and

• will know how Asoka promoted Buddhism through art.

2.3 MAURYAN PERIOD – BACKGROUND

In 321 BC, exiled general Chandragupta Maurya under guidance of the genius of Chanakya founded the Maurya dynasty after overthrowing the reigning king Dhana Nanda. Most of the Indian subcontinent was united under a single government for the first time under the Maurya rule. The Mauryan empire under Chandragupta spread its boundaries into Central Asia and Persia. Chandragupta Maurya is credited for the spread of Jainism in the southern region of India.

Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Bindusara who expanded the kingdom over most of present day India, except Kalinga. Bindusara’s kingdom was inherited by his
son Asoka the Great. During the invasion of Kalinga he renounced bloodshed and adopted the policy of *ahimsa* and taken to Buddhism. He inscribed the messages of Buddhism on the rock faces and pillars. These are known as rock and pillar edicts (Royal inscriptions). These Edicts are the oldest preserved historical documents of India, and from his time, approximate dating of dynasties becomes possible. Emperor Asoka (269-232 BC) was the first major patron of Buddhist art.

### 2.4 SCULPTURAL ART

This period has marked an imaginative and impressive step in Indian sculpting. The literature of the period mentions the guild (registered group) of artisans who worked in the projects of Asoka. The emperor made his own efforts to articulate Buddhism in stone. He declared himself as the protector of Dharma. He used Pali and Brahmi languages for issuing the edicts. To know about the Mauryan sculptural art we have to study a) capital decorations of the Mauryan capitals b) rock-cut caves and sculptures c) rounded sculptures and images d) ring stones and disc stones. Apart from these, wood was also used to create art objects and structures.

**Relief:** The relief technique has achieved the high water mark in the motifs and designs used in the carvings of the pillars. The entrance of the caves has fine animal motifs beautifully positioned. The ring-stones and disc-stones too have fine carvings in relief. This relief technique in stone becomes the major contribution of Mauryan artists to Indian artistic heritage.

**Rounded Sculpture:** The pillars, owing to their free standing nature and elaborately carved animal capitals are considered examples of sculpture. Similarly, the huge images of *yaksha* and *yakshi* are the masterpieces of Mauryan art. There are a variety of art objects created in this period include pillars, railings, parasols (stone umbrellas), capitals of the pillars, monolithic columns, animal and human sculptures and many more motifs and pieces of jewellery.

### 2.5 STYLISTIC FEATURES

A Mauryan pillar is carved out of pinkish buff fine grained sandstone which is found in plenty in the Ganga Valley a place called Chunar in UP. There are many pillars and some of them are remarkable as standing examples. The size of the pillars is massive and highly polished. The capitals of these pillars are usually made of animals, like bull, elephant or deer. *Dharmachakra* stands as the symbol of Buddhism and Mauryan art.

The Mauryan art is considered as court art, evolved with the majesty and dignity of a royal court. It exhibits great vitality and technical skill. The rounded sculptures are excellent in quality and form.

One of the important features of Mauryan art is the bright polish imparted to stone surface. The mirror like polish makes the ordinary stone a superior material.

The images are carved in round, frontal posture making them massive. Since they are dominating in size, they appear powerful and divine. The roar of the lion can be felt because of the size and expression of the capitals of the pillars.

Asoka’s imperial status was effectively brought out by the sculptors. Thus the works of art portray the attitude of Asoka towards Buddhism and his kingdom. The forms of sculptures are typical and the content was most suitable to the material they used.

On the whole, the sculptors of Mauryan times are highly skillful in carving relief on the face of stone and also carving the fine figurines with elements of beauty. The symbolism
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of Indian art attained highest merit in the expression of Asokan pillars and capitals and also of the sculptures like the Didargang Yakshi.

2.6 REPRESENTATIONAL EXAMPLES

Pillars: The pillars were carved in fine buff coloured sandstone. They were given a fine polish characteristic of Mauryan sculpture. They were inscribed with edicts of Asoka on Dhamma or righteousness. The animal capital has a finely carved lifelike representation. Noteworthy are the lion capital of Sarnath, the bull capital of Rampurva and the lion capital of Laurya Nandangarh.

Sarnath Capital: The finest and most famous of all the capitals is the Sarnath capital. It is 17 meter in height and executed with great precision. It has a unique glossy surface known as the ‘Mauryan polish’. This consists of four parts, namely, an inverted lotus covered with long sweeping petals, surmounted by a circular drum showing four chakras facing the four directions. Besides these chakras, a horse, a lion, a bull and an elephant are carved beautifully. On top of this round abacus are four alert roaring lions facing the four directions, the majestic look and realistic presentations, symbolises the strength of Buddhism. This capital served as a pedestal for a huge dhammachakra, but now the chakra is in bits and pieces. It preserved in the Sarnath museum. This lion capital is the emblem of Republic of India.

Didarganj Yakshi: The Didarganj Yakshi is an exquisite example of Mauryan sculpture. This image was found at Didarganj in Patna district. It is a rare specimen of figure showing beauty in excellence. It exhibits happiness and bounty. The Yakshi image is life-size holding a chauri (a fly whisk) in her hand, thus earning the name as chauri bearer. The sculpture is of superior quality and highly artistic in treatment. Her clothing is beautifully carved and adorned with fine jewellery.

Ring stones and Disc stones: Along with these monumental works of art and architecture produced under royal patronage, there were some works of art depicting the folk deities and beliefs like mother goddess and flower worship, carved very minutely on ring stones, which are round polished stones less than three inches in diameter having a central hole. Some of them do not have holes these are recognised as disc stones. On their surface the motifs of lotus, palm tree, birds and other animals are carved.

2.7 SUMMARY

In this unit we have covered one of the very interesting phases of Indian sculptural art of early period. We have also seen the way art carried the communication of Dharma throughout the Mauryan empire.

We have also seen that for the first time in India Chunar stone was applied to carve the relief and rounded sculptures. Some of the master pieces of this period are outstanding examples of Indian art.

It was interesting to note the wood was gradually replaced by stone in building structures and creating art works. The Asokan capitals are a class by themselves. They are found in Sarnath Museum and other places. The Mauryan art opened a floodgate of imagination which became an essential part of Indian art history.
2.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

State whether the following is true or false:

a) Chandragupta Maurya is credited for the spread of Buddhism in southern India.
b) During the invasion of Pataliputra, Asoka renounced adopted the policy of *ahimsa*. 
c) The pillars are considered as the examples of sculpture in Mauryan art.
d) The animal capital has a finely carved lifelike representation.
e) The Didarganj Yakshi is not an exquisite example of Mauryan sculpture.

Self Assessment Questions 2

Fill in the blanks by choosing the right word given in the list:

i) the messages of Buddhism, ii) Rampurva, iii) Buddhism, iv) of royal court, v) Indian recorded history.

a) Mauryan period which made the beginning of ____________
b) Asoka promoted through art ____________
c) He inscribed ____________ on the rock face and pillars.
d) The bull capital of ____________ is very artistic.
e) The Mauryan art evolved with the majesty and dignity

Self Assessment Questions 3

The beginning of the statement is given, write the concluding part

a) The finest and most famous of all the capitals ____________
b) Grained sandstone which is found in plenty in the ____________
c) The lion capital from Sarnath is ____________
d) The folk deities and beliefs like mother goddess ____________

2.9 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Give a short account of the Mauryan background.
2. Write note on the salient features of Mauryan sculpture.
3. Write note on Sarnath Pillar and Didarganj Yakshi.

2.10 ANSWERS

Self Assessment Questions 1

a) F, b) F, c) T, d) T, e) F

Self Assessment Questions 2

i) Indian recorded history. ii) Buddhism iii) the messages of Buddhism, iv) Rampurva v) of royal court.
Self Assessment Questions 3

a) is the Sarnath capital. b)Ganga Valley a place called Chunar c) the emblem of Republic India. d) and flower worship carved on ringstones

Terminal Questions

1. In 321 BC, Chandragupta Maurya under guidance of the genius of Chanakya founded the Maurya dynasty BY overthrowing the king Dhana Nanda. The subcontinent was united under a single government for the first time under the Maurya rule. The Mauryan empire under Chandragupta spread its boundaries into Central Asia and Persia.

Chandragupta was succeeded by his son Bindusara who expanded the kingdom over most of present day India. Bindusara’s kingdom was inherited by his son Asoka the Great. During the invasion of Kalinga he renounced bloodshed and adopted the policy of ahimsa and taken to Buddhism. He inscribed the messages of Buddhism on rock faces and pillars. These are known as rock and pillar edicts (Royal inscriptions) to propagate Buddhism. These edicts are the oldest preserved historical documents of India, and from his time, approximate dating of dynasties becomes possible. Emperor Asoka (269-232 BC) was the first major patron of Buddhist art.

2. Salient features of Mauryan sculptural art: The pillars are remarkable as standing examples of Mauryan art. The size of the pillars is massive and they highly polished. The capitals of these pillars are usually made of animals, like bull, elephant or deer. Dharmachakra stands as the symbol of Buddhism and Mauryan art.

Mauryan art is considered as court art and has evolved with dignity of royal court. It exhibits great vitality and technical skill. One of the important features of Mauryan art is the bright polish imparted to stone surface. The mirror like polish makes the ordinary stone a superior material. The images are carved in round, frontal posture which makes them massive. Since they are dominating in size, they appear powerful and divine. Asoka’s imperial status was effectively brought out by the sculptors. Thus the works of art portray the attitude of Asoka towards Buddhism and his kingdom. The forms of sculptures are typical and the content was most suitable to the material they used.

On the whole, the sculptors of Mauryan times are highly skillful in carving relief on the face of stone and also carving the fine figurines with elements of beauty. The symbolism of Indian art attained highest merit in the expression of Asokan pillars and capitals and also of the sculptures like Didargang Yakshi.

3. Note on the Sarnath Pillar – the Lion Capital:

The finest and most famous of all the capitals is the Sarnath capital. It is 17 meter in height and executed with great precision. It has unique glossy surface known as the ‘Mauryan polish’. This consists of four parts, namely, an inverted lotus covered with long sweeping petals, surmounted by a circular drum showing four chakras facing the four directions. Besides these chakras a, horse, a lion, a bull and an elephant are carved beautifully. On top of this round abacus are four alert roaring lions facing the four directions, they look majestic and are carved in a realistic manner, symbolising the strength of Buddhism. This capital served as a pedestal for a huge dharmachakra, but now the chakra is in bits and pieces which are preserved in the Sarnath museum. This lion capital is the emblem of the Republic of India.
Note on Didarganj Yakshi:

Sculptures like the Didarganj Yakshi are an exquisite example of Mauryan sculpture. This image was found at Didarganj in Patna district. It is a rare specimen of a figure showing beauty in excellence. It exhibits happiness and bounty. The Yakshi image is of life size holding a *chauri* (a fly whisk) in her hand thus earning the name of *chauri* bearer. The sculpture is of superior quality and highly artistic in treatment. Her clothing is beautifully covered and adorned with fine jewellery.

Mauryan Sculptures – Photo caption

01. Asokan Lion Capital – stone, Sarnath Museum, Mauryan

02. Asoka’s Pillar Inscription – stone, Maurya
03. Didarganj Yakshi – stone, Mauryan
UNIT 3  SCULPTURES – GANDHARA, MATHURA AND AMARAVATI SCHOOLS

Structure

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objectives

3.3 Kushana and Shatavahana period - Background

3.4 Sculptural art
   Relief
   Rounded Sculptures

3.5 Stylistic Features

3.6 Representational Examples

3.7 Summary

3.8 Self-Assessment Questions

3.9 Terminal Questions

3.10 Terminal Questions and Answers

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we have studied the early Buddhist phase of Indian sculpture during the Mauryan period. This period made a great beginning in introducing stone for sculptures. In this unit we will see the development of sculptural art in three Schools of Art. Indian art flourished in the three geographical regions of Gandhara, Mathura and down south in Amaravati. The use of different stones in the Kushana and Satavahana periods bring new styles in the art of sculpture. We will study the salient features of the sculptures in this period along with a few masterpieces of art.

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- discuss brief background of Kushana and Shatavahana periods which made the beginning of new phase in Indian sculpture.

- discuss the information about the three schools of sculpture namely Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati in South India.

- understand the fine techniques adopted in stone carving in these three schools.

3.3 KUSHANA AND SATAVAHANA PERIOD - BACKGROUND

After the Mauryan rule in Magadha the Shunga who were Brahmin officers under Mauryas came to power and ruled during 2nd – 1st centuries BC. Being Brahmin rulers, they patronized the Vedic religion but they equally promoted Buddhism. The Sanchi
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stupa was extended to the present size, the Barhut stupa was built and even Karle rock cut caves dedicated to Buddhist and Bhaja cave, the first instance of the representation of Vedic deities were executed in their times. From the point of view of the style, the sculptures of Shunga period are truly Indian in inspiration and very impressive.

North India came under the rule of a new political power from 170 BC to early 2nd century. The Kushans were nomadic people who started migrating from the Tarim basin in Central Asia and very soon they founded an empire in northwestern India. They had contact with Greeks and Romans. Their culture was the combination of nomadic, Indian and Greco-Roman elements. It was under Kanishka around the year 78 CE the Kushans emerged as a powerful empire. He adopted Buddhism and made Buddhism the state religion. He followed the footsteps of Asoka and made great efforts to spread Buddhism along the Silk Route, a land route that connected Greece to China.

Kanishka was responsible for propagating the new branch of Buddhism known as Mahayana. He held several councils to consolidate and spread Buddhism. One of his major contributions is introducing the image of Buddha. Before Kanishka, Buddha was worshiped in the stupas in the form of symbols. Kanishka issued a golden coin where for the first time the figure of Buddha appears. After that, Kanishka sponsored the sculptors of Greco-Roman origin to create the image of Buddha and the narrative sculptures associated with the life of Buddha. He also got his images done in large sizes. During the successful reign of Kanishka and his successors, two Schools of sculptural art emerged in North India known as Gandhara and Mathura. Gandhara was the capital city of Kushan kingdom and Mathura was another capital which located centrally in the Kushan Empire. These schools have produced distinct objects of distinct art styles, which we will discuss in detail.

At the same time, another dynasty (under the Mauryas) known as the Satavahanas ruled from South India. They made the present Andhra Pradesh as the centre of their activities. They are one of the longest dynasties who ruled for nearly 400 years from 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD. They were responsible for opening a glorious chapter in South Indian history. The famous rulers of the dynasty are Hala, the author of the famous text Saptashati, Gautamiputra Shatakarni, a great conqueror and Vasishthioutra Pulumayi and others. They followed the Vedic religion but promoted Buddhism and Jainism greatly in their empires. Thus we see the growth of Vedic, Buddhist, and Jain religion, art and architecture in their empire which extended from Central India to down south. Their rule covered Maharashtra and Karnataska besides Andhra Pradesh. During their times the famous Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda stupas were constructed and they were the great pilgrimage centres of ancient India. The famous Amaravati school of Buddhist art emerges from this place.

3.4 SCULPTURAL ART

Having such a background and source, the Kushan rulers had outstanding achievements in art. Gandhara was located in the centre of Kushan Empire. It was also a trade capital and meeting place for the merchants who traveled on the Silk Route. Kanishka introduced Buddha images in his empire which were made in Gandhara with heavy Greco-Roman influence. Similarly, Buddha images were created by the Indian sculptors in Mathura.

Relief: In the art of the Gandhara School the high relief technique is given importance. The story and events of Buddha's life were carved in high relief. The sculptors have chosen soft stone for the carvings. In the Mathura School of Art, the relief is higher compared to the Gandhara School of Sculpture. In the Amaravati style the relief
sculptures are more artistic because of the stone they used. White or cream limestone was used in creating the plaques of the Amaravati stupa. We will study more about the under stylistic features.

Rounded Sculpture: Rounded Sculptures were created in good number in both the art centres of Gandhara and Mathura. Colossal statues were made to show the imperial status of Buddhism and power. We find the big size sculptures of the rulers of Kushan dynasty. Buddha and Bodhisatva figures are also found in good number. In the Amaravati School there are very few round sculptures.

3.5 STYLISTIC FEATURES

Gandhara School of Art: Stylistically, the Gandhara School sculpture represents Greco-Buddhist art. The important features of this art form are that the sculptors are extremely fine and realistic. The Buddha and Bodhisatva sculptures display quite a sophisticated iconography in an advanced style. The Gandhara sculptures suggest the earliest representations of the Buddha. Many plaques which were the parts of stupa earlier show the scenes of the birth of Buddha, his enlightenment, sermon at the deer park, his death and others.

The most important trait of Gandhara sculpture is found in the depiction of Lord Buddha in the standing or seated positions. The seated Buddha is always shown cross-legged in the traditional Indian way. Another typical feature of the Gandhara Art is the rich carving, elaborate ornamentation and complex symbolism. The aesthetic quality of the Gandhara Buddhas is different from that of the Mathura Buddhas. The Buddha and Bodhisatva figures resemble the Greek God Apollo with broad shoulders, halo around the head and these resemble a powerful hero rather than a yogi. The dress of the Buddha is depicted as realistic with many folds. The physical features such as muscles, nails, hair have been done with great detail. The drapery, heavy ornamentation and moustaches featured on the images of Buddha and Bodhisatva were far from the Indian idealism.

Mathura School of Art: Mathura also was a great centre of art and culture during the period of the Kushans. In Gandhara art the Greco-Roman influence is strongly present. In Mathura art, the important religions of India, such as Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism are represented. It is believed that the first Buddha images were carved at Mathura at the same time as in the Gandhara School. Mathura has produced Buddha images of various dimensions.

The Mathura style evolved with native spirit and elements. There are quite a number of female figures on the railings of the stupas, and these are beautifully attired according to Indian taste. The spirit of Mathura sculpture displays the peaceful atmosphere. The features are naturalistic rather than realistic. The Indian elements derived from the ideal yogi type, namely the lotus feet and the meditative gaze. Mathura artists rejected the Greco-Roman realistic features and chose naturalistic features to create the sculptures. The entire figure clothed with refinement. The workshop of Mathura exported several Buddhist images to various places, such as Sarnath and even as far as Rajgir in Bihar.

Amaravati School of Sculpture: During the Satavahana period, an aesthetic movement of greater magnitude developed in Andhra Pradesh. Several stupas with refined sculptures of exceptional beauty are the contributions of this period. The sculptures belonging to Amaravati school are found in the valley of Krishna on the sites and museums of Jaggayapetta, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda. The collection of the stupa plaques are found at British Museum, London and Government Museum, Chennai.
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The Amaravati style is more elegant and sophisticated. The sculptured panels of Amaravati are characterised by delicacy of forms, and linear grace. Numerous scenes of dance and music adorn these reliefs displaying joy of life. The sculptural remains of Amaravati, known as the ‘marbles’ are created by using white limestone. It creates the illusion of marble and is as fresh as when it was carved. As Buddha had chosen the new path of freedom the artists of the Amaravati School have chosen their own style and freely expressed their artistic abilities.

3.6 REPRESENTATIONAL EXAMPLES

Buddha Icon: A Buddha figure belonging to mid 2nd century BC is well preserved in Central Museum, Lahore in Pakistan. It is a standing Buddha with legs apart and is carved in the blue-grey stone. The figure is clothed in a long, flowing robe (costume). He stands bare-footed on a base carved with six devotees worshipping a stupa. The figure’s left hand holds the edge of the robe and the right hand which was attached (found missing) was probably in the abhaya mudra. A halo around the head is prominent and the curly hair is combed neatly in a tuft. The body weight and standing posture indicate a static posture not a moving one. The clothing and drapery has no Indian influence.

The Events of Buddha’s Life: One well preserved plaque from Gandhara is in the collection of the Washington (USA). It depicts the three events in the life of Buddha. The first portion show the queen Mayadevi, the mother of Buddha, in the second Buddha is meditating under Bodhi tree while the demon associates of Mara disturb the meditating Buddha. Third part of the plaque shows the death of Buddha, the parinirvana. In all these the Greco-Roman features and realism has been executed. The tree and creeper have stylised decorative treatment. All the images are executed with great detail but they are static and lifeless, lacking natural movement.

Bodhisatva: This Bodhisatva is in Gandhara style. Unlike Buddha, this Bodhisatva is dressed like a king with royal jewels and robes. Long dressed hair, realistic drapery and the standing posture show imperialistic and worldly involvement.

Buddha (Mathura School of Kushan period): This figure is the masterpiece of the Kushan period. It is an image of Buddha depicting entirely Indian ideals and characteristics. The figure is seated on a lion throne with a big size halo around the head; the hair is combed in a natural way. The clothing is in Indian taste. This figure is made of red sand stone from Sikri.

Bodhisatva Sakhyamuni (Mathura Kushana School): This figure in all its characteristics is closer to the Yaksha figure. But certain specific characteristics of Bodhisatva have been added. The large nimbus (halo) with sun rays, the right hand is in abhaya mudra, and the left hand holds a water pot. The standing posture and expression on the face depicts the royalty naturally. These are the essential qualities of Mathuran sculptures.

Stupa carving (Amaravati School): The great stupa of Amaravati is depicted in relief with all the details of a real stupa. Such panels were created in number. This is preserved in Government Museum, Chennai. Above the stupa Buddha is seated on the throne giving a sermon. One can imagine the artistic merit of Amaravati Stupa by observing this slab.

Women adoring Buddha (Amaravati School): Women devotees offering their prayers to the footprints of Lord Buddha. Probably, it belongs to the early phase of the Amaravati
School preserved in Government Museum, Chennai. One can observe the natural grace of these devotees.

3.7 SUMMARY

We have covered the three major schools flourished during 2nd century BCE to 2nd century CE in Kushan and Satavahana Empire. During this period, Buddhism moved from Hinayana to Mahayana Buddhism i.e., from symbolic imagery to human imagery. This is observed in Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati schools of sculptures. We have seen how the Gandhara sculptures developed with Greco-Roman influence and the Mathura sculptures with pure Indian style. These Schools initiated a great phase of Indian art and architecture.

3.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

Fill in the blanks with suitable words from the text that follows:

(a) Satavahanas (b) Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda stupas (c) 78 CE (d) gold coin (e) Greco-Roman elements

a) The culture of Kushans was the combination of nomadic, Indian and ________
b) It was under Kanishka in the year ________ the Kushans emerged powerful empire.
c) Kanishka issued a _________________ where for the first time the figure of Buddha appears.
d) The _________________ were responsible for opening a glorious chapter in South Indian history.
e) During the times of Shatavahanas the famous ________ ________ were constructed.

Self Assessment Questions 2

Choose the correct answers

a) Mathura school of sculpture belongs to the period of
   i. Indus  ii. Kushana  iii. Satavahanas
b) Gandhara was the capital of
   i. Kushana Empire  ii. Chalukyan Empire  iii. Shaka Empire
c) Amaravati is located in
   i. Madhya Pradesh  ii. Uttar Pradesh  iii. Andhra Pradesh

Self Assessment Questions 3

State whether True or False

a) The Gandhara sculptures suggest the later representations of the Buddha.
b) The aesthetic quality of Gandhara Buddha is much similar to Mathura Buddhas.
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c) In Mathura Art, the important religions of India, such as Brahmanism, Jainism and Buddhism are represented.
d) The Mathura style evolved with foreign spirit and elements.
e) The Amaravati style is elegant and sophisticated.

3.9 ANSWERS

Self Assessment Questions 1

a) Greco-roman, b) 78 CE, c) gold coin, d) Satavahanas, e) Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda stupas

Self Assessment Questions 2

Right answer – a) Kushanas, b) Kushana Empire, c) Andhra Pradesh

Self Assessment Questions 3

a) – F, b) – F, c) – T, d) – F, e) T

3.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. Explain the importance of Kanishka for Buddhism

2. In what way the Gandhara and Mathura Schools of Sculptures differ?

3. Write note on the one representational examples of each of Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati Schools of art.

1. It was under Kanishka around the year 78 CE that the Kushans emerged as a powerful empire. He adopted Buddhism and made Buddhism as the state religion. He followed the footsteps of Asoka and made great efforts to spread Buddhism along the Silk Route, a land route which connected Greece to China. Kanishka was responsible for propagating the new branch of Buddhism known as Mahayana. He held several Councils to consolidate and spread Buddhism. One of his major contributions is introducing the image of Buddha. Before Kanishka, Buddha was worshiped in the stupas in the form of symbols. Kanishka issued a golden coin where for the first time the figure of Buddha appears. After that, Kanishka sponsored the sculptors of Greco-Roman origin to create the image of Buddha and the narrative sculptures associated with the life of Buddha. He also got his images done in large size.

2. The most important trait of Gandhara sculpture is found in the depiction of Lord Buddha in the standing or seated positions. The seated Buddha is always shown cross-legged in the traditional Indian way. Another typical feature of the Gandhara Art is the rich carving, elaborate ornamentation and complex symbolism. The aesthetic quality of Gandhara Buddha is different from that of Mathura Buddhas. The Buddha and Bodhisatva figures resemble the Greek God Apollo with broad shoulders, a halo around the head and resembles a powerful hero rather than a yogi. The dress of Buddha is realistically depicted with many folds. The physical features such as muscles, nails, hair have been created in great detail. The drapery, heavy ornamentation and moustaches featured on the images of Buddha and Bodhisatva were far from the Indian ideal. The Mathura Buddha images are carved in Sikhri red stone with natural grace and sophistication. The Gandhara sculptures are carved in blue schist, soft stone.
3. a) **Buddha Icon from Gandhara School of art:** A Buddha figure belonging to mid 2nd century is well preserved in Central Museum, Lahore in Pakistan. It is a standing Buddha with legs apart, is carved in the blue-grey stone and belongs to the schist family. The figure is clothed in a long, flowing robe (costume). He stands bare-footed on a base carved with six devotees worshipping a stupa. The figure’s left hand holds the edge of the robe and the right hand which was attached (is missing) probably in **abhaya mudra.** A halo around the head is prominent and the curly hair is combed neatly in a tuft. The body weight and standing posture indicate a static posture but not moving one. The clothing and drapery has no Indian influence.

b) **Buddha from Mathura school of Kushan period:** This figure is the masterpiece of the Kushan period. It is an image of Buddha depicting entirely Indian ideal and characteristics. The figure is seated on a lion throne with a big size halo around the head; the hair is combed in a natural way. The clothing is Indian. This figure is made of red sand stone from Sikri.

c) **Stupa carving from Amaravati school:** The great stupa of Amaravati is depicted in relief with all the details of a real stupa preserved in Government Museum, Chennai. Such panels were created in large numbers. Above them Buddha is seated on the throne giving a sermon. One can imagine the artistic merit of the Amaravati Stupa by carefully observing this slab.

**GANDHARA, MATHURA and AMARAVATI SCULPTURES**

01. Standing Buddha – stone, Gandhara School (courtesy – after Concise History of Art in India Roy C. Craven)
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02. Bodhisatva – stone Gandhara School (courtesy – after Concise History of Art in India
Roy C. Craven)

03. Seated Buddha – stone, Mathura School (courtesy – after Concise History of Art in India
Roy C. Craven)
04. Standing Yaksha and Bodhisatva – Mathura School (courtesy – after Concise History of Art in India Roy C. Craven)

05. Stupa Relief carving – stone, Government Museum Chennai, Amaravati School
Indian Sculpture – Major Schools

06. Devotees – stone, Government Museum, Chennai Amaravati School
4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we have studied the early Buddhist phase of Indian sculpture during the Kushan and Shatavahana Periods. This period made a great beginning in introducing different styles of sculpture in Indian art. In this unit we will study the development of sculptural art in the Gupta period. It was the age of classical art in India. Architecture, sculpture, painting, music, dance, literature flourished with perfection in the Gupta Empire. We will study the salient features of the sculptures in this period along with few masterpieces of art.

4.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to

- discuss a brief background of Gupta period which made the beginning of classical phase in Indian sculpture.
- know the reason why the Gupta age was known as Golden period.
- know the fine techniques and style adopted in stone carving in Hindu and Buddhist iconography.

4.3 GUPTA PERIOD - BACKGROUND

The artistic activity continued after the Kushana and Satavahana rule in north India. The age of the Guptas followed. The Gupta period saw the mighty upsurge of national art. This period is popularly known as the Golden Age in the history of India. The famous Gupta emperors were Samudra Gupta who ruled in 325-375 CE, Chandragupta Vikramaditya 376 -413 CE, and Kumara Gupta 413 – 455 CE. Indian literature, religion, art and literature attained the great height of their glory. The Gupta art and
culture not only spread to every nook and corner of India but also reached the Himalayan region and Central Asia. This cultural phase extended towards the south-east across the ocean into the islands of Indonesia or what was known at that time as Dvipantara.

This cultural development was due to economic prosperity. This had a direct relation on the spirituality, which India had not seen before. The 4th to 6th century CE was an age of all-round perfection in domestic, administrative and cultural life in India. In literature, this period has produced the great poet Kalidasa. Art creation had a great influence of religion. The Bhagavata movement, faith in Krishna as a child and god was widespread and supported a cult of beauty and aesthetics. It promoted the building of temples, creating images in clay, stone and metal. Buddhism was equally patronised as we can see in the artistic activities in Ajanta.

4.4 SCULPTURAL ART

The renowned Gupta sculptural style appears to have grown out of the Kushan style. In Mathura, art had already flourished in Indian style, which was touched with refinement in all aspects under the patronage of the illustrious Gupta rulers. The Gupta period (4th – 6th Century CE) marks the bright period of art in India. Gupta art is marked by a high aesthetic sense and discipline. The main centres of Buddhist art during this period were Mathura, Sarnath and Nalanda in the north.

The Buddhist images of Mathura and Sarnath are some of the best specimens of Indian art, never equalled by any art creations of later period. The other places where we get to see Gupta sculptures are the Vishnu sculptures in Udayagiri rock-cut Caves, Dhamek stupa at Sarnath, Bhitargaon, Buddhist caves in Ajanta, Abhichhatra, and Dasavatara Temple in Deogarh. A geographical survey of Gupta art reveals that almost every centre received the flow of the essence of golden age. It was a special temperament to create anything good and perfect in quality and content. Art in Gupta period achieved classical status. Many texts were return and used as module for creating art works. The dynasties which ruled after the Gupta age in north and south India imbibed the artistic elements of Gupta age and continued the tradition of idealistic beauty.

Relief sculptures: We find many sculptures done in high relief. In Ajanta, the rock surface was sophisticatedly treated with the Buddhist theme and motifs in high relief. The relief were executed with utmost skills. The halo of Buddha, the decorative elements on the large size sculptures and stupas show the mastery of artists over the stone carving.

Bas-Relief: Since the sculptures at Ajanta were carved in impressive size, the sculptors followed the bas-relief technique. The Buddha images and stupas decorations are carved in live rock with three fourths of the image emerging out.

Rounded Sculpture: For the first time the Hindu gods and subjects were carved in rounded shapes during Gupta period. In the Udayagiri Rock-cut architecture, a monolithic Varaha image with all details are carved. In the Dasavatara temple, full length sculptures of Vishnu are carved in round. The tree dimensional effect is achieved in all rounded sculptures of Gupta age. For making rounded sculptures the Gupta artists used stone, clay, wood and bronze. These sculptures are highly expressive and charming.

4.5 STYLISTIC FEATURES

- The delicate folds of the transparent garment adorning the Gupta figures were done in a beautiful style.
• The profusely decorated halo is another special feature of the art of the Gupta figure. The relief work reaches perfection here.

• The delicate modelling of forms with meditative repose rendered the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures of the Gupta period most attractive.

• The Gupta figures are carved with elaborately carved ornamental details which make the divine figures very special in appearance.

• The art of terracotta and casting figures in stucco reached its zenith in this period. The artist tried clay figurines on a small scale whereas the stucco figurines are in large dimensions. The terracotta figurines were used in the brick temples. These figurines were of great variety and beauty.

• Gupta art is beautiful in both outer form and inner inspiration. Beauty and virtue served as ideals of the age. Refinement was the order of the day.

• Decoration was the necessary feature of the Gupta sculpture. But they never over-decorated their figures or images. They maintained harmony of decoration, form and content which is the best quality of a good art.

• The Gupta figures are large in proportion but extremely light in visual perception. They appear to be floating in air. They are marked by the sense of weightlessness.

• The eyes of Gupta sculptures are beautifully shaped half closed, in yogic posture.

• The face is generally oval shaped with sharp features.

• The overall treatment of the figures is highly idealised, evoking serenity. The drapery is light and clings to the body, exposing the softness of the body.

• The Gupta artists showed an equal ingenuity in the carving of metal images also. The bronze Buddha image from Sultanganj and also one from Dhanesar Khera together with a number of specimens found in north-western part of India are excellent specimens testifying to the skill and ability of the Gupta metal carvers.

4.6 REPRESENTATIONAL EXAMPLES

Standing Buddha from Saranath: This is an exclusive figure and a masterpiece of Gupta art. It is in the collection of National Museum, Delhi. The large size halo gives a great visual impact. A number of lesser size images of similar features are found in Saranath and have been categorised as ‘wet Buddhas’. The appearance of these figures are such as they have just come out from water. The modelling of the body beneath the thin garment is highly sophisticated. The hair is neatly combed in tuft and the face is serene. It is made of brown sand stone from Sikri.

Buddha in preaching mode: This seated Buddha made in Chunar sand stone is in the collection of the Sarnath museum. Buddha is in a preaching attitude known as Dharmachakra mudra. His clothing is only suggested through hemlines. The halo has special carving which is repeated on the throne beautifully. Two Gandharvas in flying mode on the sides of the halo suggest the heavenly status of Buddha. This is the masterpiece of Gupta art.

The river Goddess Ganga: This is an exclusive female figure of Gupta period (Later the images of Ganga and Yamuna flanking the door way of the temples become common feature all over India). She stands on the crocodile to show her presence in water. The figure is more realistic and stands in tribhanga. The two small figures next to her are in
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action. The tree is shown bearing plenty of fruits. The entire panel is a good example of an artistic composition.

**Vishnu reclining – as anantashayi:** Dasavatara Temple Deogarh. In this sculpture the Buddhist narrative feature is adopted for the first time in all its detail. Lord Vishnu, one of the Trimurtis is portrayed as reclining on a giant serpent with several hoods. He is the Preserver of the world order and plans for its execution. The world around him is in action. Brahma rising from umbilical cord of Vishnu is associated with the celestials; Lakshmi seated on the extreme corner and below a group of celestials are guarding the abode of Vishnu. This is an iconographic presentation of the Vishnu theme. The artist has composed all the figures in upper, middle and lower registers. It stands as the first and best example for the Hindu theme in sculpture.

### 4.7 SUMMARY

We have seen how the Gupta golden age period contributed much to the world. Apart from their strong political power they established sound administrative and economic system; They also contributed greatly to the field of literature, science, art and architecture. Vedic religion was revived and Buddhist art flourished in Ajanta. A firm foundation was laid for all arts by writing texts in this period. Indian classical arts like dance, music, sculpture, painting, architecture find their roots in Gupta art.

### 4.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

**Self Assessment Questions 1**

**Match the Following:**

| a) Udayagiri | i) Dhamek stupa |
| b) Deogarh | ii) Varaha sculpture |
| c) Sarnath | iii) Literature |
| d) Bas-relief | iv) Dashavatara Temple |
| e) Kalidasa | v) Ajanta |

**Self Assessment Questions 2**

**Pick up the right answer**

1. Gupta period is dated
   - i. 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> Century BC, ii. 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century CE, iii. 1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE

2. The master piece of Gupta art, the standing Buddha, is from
   - i. Bhitargaon, ii. Ajanta, iii. Sarnath

3. The Bronze Buddha figure is from
   - i. Sultan Ganj, ii. Murshidabad, iii. Pataliputra

**Self Assessment Questions 3**

**State whether true or false:**

a) The halo of Buddha, does not show the mastery of artists over the stone carving  
   - F

b) The Gupta sculptures are highly expressive and charming.  
   - T

c) The Gupta sculptures show classical charm.
   - F
d) The art in Gupta age lacks perfection.

e) Gupta art displays love for decorations.

4.9 ANSWERS TO SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1

a) – ii, b) – iv, c) – i, d) – v, e) - iii

Self Assessment Questions 2

1. - ii, 2 – iii, 3 – i

Self Assessment Questions 3

a) – F, b) – T, c) – T, d) – F, e) – T

4.10 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. State the significance of Gupta art in knowing Indian culture.

2. Explain the stylistic features of Gupta sculptures.

3. Write a note on two sculptures of Gupta period.

4.11 ANSWERS TO TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Gupta period had witnessed all round development. The cultural development was due to the economic prosperity. This had a direct relation to spirituality, which India had not seen before. It was an age of all-round perfection in domestic, administrative and cultural life in India. In literature, this period has produced the great poet Kalidasa. Art creation had a great influence of religion. The Bhagavata movement, faith in Krishna as a child and god was wide spread and supported a cult of beauty and aesthetics. It promoted the building of temples, creating images in clay, stone and metal. Buddhism was equally patronised as we see in the artistic activities in Ajanta.

2. The profusely decorated halo is another special feature of the art of the Gupta figure. The relief work reaches highest perfection here. The delicate modelling of forms with meditative repose rendered the Buddha and Bodhisattva figures of the Gupta period most attractively. The Gupta figures are carved with elaborately carved ornamental details which make the divine figures very special in appearance. Gupta art is beautiful in both outer form and inner inspiration. Beauty and virtue served as ideals of the age. Refinement was the order of the day. Decoration was the necessary feature of the Gupta sculpture. But they never over-decorated their figures or images. They maintained harmony of decoration, form and content which is the best quality of good art.

3. Short Notes 1. Standing Buddha from Saranath: This is an exclusive figure and a master piece of Gupta art. It is in the collection of National Museum Delhi. The large size halo gives a great visual impact. A number of lesser size images of similar features are found in Saranath and have been categorised as ‘wet Buddhas’. The appearance of these figures are as if they have just come out from water. The modelling of the body beneath the thin garment is highly sophisticated. The hair is neatly combed in tuft and the face is serene. It is made of brown sandstone from Sikri.
4. **Vishnu reclining – as Anantashayi**: Dasavatara Temple Deogarh. In this sculpture the Buddhist narrative feature is adopted for the first time in all its detail. Lord Vishnu, one of the Trimurtis is portrayed as reclining on a giant serpent with several hoods. He is the Preserver of the world order and plans for the execution. The world around him is in action. Brahma rising from umbilical cord of Vishnu is associated with the celestials; Lakshmi is seated on the extreme corner and below a group of celestials are guarding the abode of Vishnu. This is an iconographic presentation of the Vishnu theme. The artist has composed all the figures in upper, middle and lower registers. It stands as the first and best example for the Hindu theme in sculpture.

**Gupta Sculptures**

1. Standing Buddha – stone, National museum Collection, Gupta
2. Seated Buddha – stone, Sarnath Museum Museum Collection, Gupta

3. Standing Buddha – Bronze, Sultanganj Gupta
4. Vishnu as Anantashayi – stone, Deogarh Temple, Gupta

5. A plaque showing Ganga – stone Gupta
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