

CHAPTER: IV

MATHURA AND GANDHARA SCHOOL OF ART

“Art by its nature is a visual commentary on or a concrete manifestation of thought which is abstract and invisible. Objects of art are like documentaries of a thought – world that has departed. These creations have preserved the thought – forms of bygone ages, with all the vitality and inspiration of the consciousness that brought them into existence.”¹In the evolution of human cognitive expressions, art and architecture are significant milestones. They promote and strengthen the creative faculties and also act as a great source of inspiration. Coming from varied backgrounds, styles and schools of thought, the Indian art is a creative masterpiece that captures the aesthetic beauty of the land and has attracted tourists from all over the world. A thorough study of the meaning and philosophy of art and architecture brings to light the fact that they are precursors to cultured objects, activities and intangible aspects.

Indian art forms have continuously evolved over thousands of years. In ancient India, various art forms like paintings, architecture and sculpture evolved. The history of art in ancient India begins with prehistoric rock paintings. Such rock paintings can be seen in the Bhimbetaka paintings, belonging to the prehistoric age. Thereafter, an advanced town planning is seen in Harappa and Mohenjodaro, with their centrally planned cities indicating a highly developed architecture.

Evolution of sculptural art

The First archaeological evidence of sculptural art in India, are the images of mother goddesses and the remarkable example of sculpture from Harappan civilization comes in the form of the dancing girl from Mohenjodaro. Their antiquity can be traced back to the

Harappan civilization. The use of symbolic forms in art is as old as the Harappan seals. The fire altars of the Vedic period, with their astronomical and mathematical significance also play an important role in the evolution of the rock-cut cave architecture and temple architecture. The Buddhists initiated the rock-cut caves, Hindus and Jains started to imitate them at Badami, Aihole, Ellora, Salsette,

Elephanta, Aurangabad and Mahabalipuram. The rock-cut art has continuously evolved, since the first rock cut caves of Barabar in Bihar.

The lively traditions of Indian sculpture date back to the first Indian empire, that of the Maurya dynasty. Sculptors begin to carve characters and scenes from the stories of India's three interconnected religions - Hinduism, Buddhism and to a lesser extent Jainism. The evidence from the early Buddhist Mauryan sculptures sheds some more interesting light on the convention of conceiving these divine figures of *Yakshas* in human form. The Buddha, whose presence on the piece of cloth, is indicated by his footprints.

Apart from rock-cut caves, stupas and *viharas*, pillars, and monumental figure sculptures were carved at several places in India. The Mauryan pillars were rock-cut and inscribed therefore the carver's skill can be seen. The vigorous figures were carved on the top of the pillars. The lion capital from Sarnath is one of the finest representatives of Mauryan art. A life-size standing image of a yakshini holding a chauri (flywhisk) was another example. The beauty of the image is, to be carved well-proportioned and smooth surface showing sophistication in the treatment of form and medium.² (The Sunga-Andhra epoch (2nd-1st Century B.C) was one of the most creative periods of Buddhist art. Though the Sunga rulers were followers of the Brahmanism, but they were moderate towards Buddhism and there was no set-back in the propagation or popularity of the Buddhist faith. Buddhist establishments flourished in Bodhi-Gaya, Bharhut, and Sanchi in Northern and Central India, in Amaravati and Jaggayapeta in South India, at Bhaja, Nasik, Karle and at several other places in Western India. The art of this period consists mainly in the excavation of the rock-cut caves or *viharas* (some of which are embellished with paintings) and the erection of railings and *toranas* (gateways) to the Buddhist Stupas at different places). In the early centuries, Hindu and Buddhist art fall within the same tradition (the magnificent Buddhist carvings on the Great Stupa at Sanchi seem entirely Hindu) while Buddhist sculpture acquires a character of its own when the religion moves outwards from India to the northwest. The *Buddhacharita*, (early second century CE) sung in the canonical literature is a popular subject for narrative Buddha panels in Gandhara region also.

While in all the scenes, depicting the different incidents in the life of the Buddha, his presence is suggested symbolically, either with his footprints, the parasol and the flywhisks, the wheel or the *Pipal* tree. For example, Buddha's mother sportively blends the branch of the Shala tree, the child Buddha coming out from her side is held wrapped in a cloth by an attendant standing by her side. The guardians of the four quarters, too, are awaiting to witness this miraculous event and receive the child on wrap of cloth are shown standing in reverence, while the presence of the divine Buddha is suggested by the footprints on the cloth held by them..

Thus one can conclude that Buddha was supposed to be superior to the *Yaksha*, *Lokapalas*, or even the King of gods, the Indra or other Brahmanical gods. In the famous depiction of the VisvantaraJataka on the arch of the gateway at Sanchi, Indra is depicted in iconic human form. His figure was so divine and marked with exceptionally auspicious signs that it could not be perceived properly or caught in the sketch or in stone by a painter or a sculptor. Stories of artist trying to catch his likeness in the medium chosen by the artist and becoming unsuccessful in their endeavour have been enumerated by Hiuean-Tsang in his travel accounts. It was because of such beliefs which were firmly grounded in the minds of the contemporary people that there must have been a resistance to depict even a super human hero like a *Chakravartin* in his human form.

Beside human forms in sculpture the symbolic depictions, lofty pillars perched on top with a heraldic sign were raised in the memory of the heroes. Such pillars were called *dhvajas* in imitation of the standards fixed in front of their respective chariots when they marched to the battle fields such as *Taladhvaja*, *Makaradhvaja* etc., and were carved quite frequently in the sculptural panels depicting the heroes. It is very common in the Jaina canonical literature to describe that the Chaityas meant for the worship of the Tirthankaras were fronted with '*Siha-cakka-jjhayas*' installed there. The Ayagpattas from Mathura show such depictions of the Jainadhvajas. Instance of such standards topped with four adorned lions and a discus held high by *ganas* is to be seen and guessed at the cave temples of Karle and Kanheri. A miniature depiction of such a facade of the cave is noticed on one of the pillars in the nave of the *chaitya* at Kanheri. The *Siha-jjhaya* suggested that the Buddha was ShakyaSimha and the wheel that he was an emperor, in the realm of spirituality (*Dhamma-cakkavatti*).

During the reign of Kushans, India's most important styles in sculpture were developed. It is between the 2nd and 5th century CE that the Gandhara art and the art of Mathura came in existence as their separate identity. Among these, the Gandhara art mainly contains sculptures those present images of the Buddha from the earliest period. This art is named as above after the region of Gandhara, which is the place now in Pakistan. Earlier than evolution of this art, the Buddha's presence was primarily represented only through symbols. It can be seen that the Gandhara style was tremendously influenced by Hellenistic art (originated in Greece) of second century and it was seen that it is highly influential in the countries from central and eastern Asia. The Kushana period of imperialism, at its grandest moment, reigned over the region covering present-day Afghanistan, north-west Pakistan and north-western India. The rise and growth of the Kushanas as a political power (1st century to 3rd century CE.) coincided with a great cultural ferment in the region. The age of maturity in Indian classical art began in Kushana period. Kanishka I, the third member in the Kushana royal line who developed the empire to its fullest extent, was a great patron of the Buddhist religion and under him Buddhist art production received a significant stimulus.

Artistic activities were fairly widespread and two main spheres of Kushana art are generally recognised - the broader Bactria - Gandhara region in the north-west lower Kabul Valley and upper Indus around Peshawar where strongly Hellenised works and Persian influence were produced, and northern India, particularly the Mathura region, where works in the Indian style were produced.

An important aspect of Kushana art is the emphasis on the emperor himself as a divine persona. This is visible in a number of contexts, including the coinage of the Kushan rulers and in important surviving shrines from which a cult of the divine emperor may be inferred.

While the early Buddhist artists used symbols to represent the presence of the Buddha, beginning with the Kushana rule, the Buddha was represented in human form. It is not yet quite clear where the first images of the Buddha were produced. Most Indian scholars believe that the Buddha image originated in Mathura and not in Gandhara.

Under the rule of Kushanas, only at different geographical area i.e. farther east and south at the contemporary Mathura, 'the Mathura style' was developed. This place had created a wholly Indian sculptural art. The usual medium used for sculpturing was the reddish limestone. So, for the summary, Buddhist iconography was evolved & widely used during the Gandhara period but that of Mathura has preserved and developed the art of Indian forms for three centuries. In Amaravati, situated in the eastern Deccan, a different type of art form evolved and flourished for nearly six centuries commencing from 200-100 BC. Patronized first by the Satavahanas and later by the Ikshvakus and also by other groups (feudatories, officials, and merchants), four periods of activity are easily discernible.

Through in the successive stages, one may observe an advance technique and refinement. The first period dating from 200-100 BC, is evidenced at Jagayyapeta, where a few slabs on decorative pieces at the base of the stupa have been found. These slabs depict pilasters at intervals with animals above bell-shaped capitals and devotees adoring the Buddha, who is symbolically represented.

The casing slabs above the platform are to be attributed to the second period. Dating from 100 BC to CE 100, these slabs contain superposed panels depicting the Buddha in preaching form. The figures are more graceful and natural than those of the first period. They depict the principal scenes of Buddha's life, the Buddha almost always being represented by a symbol, though in two or three places he is personified, the earliest cases of his personification on record.

The foundation of the Gupta Empire in the 4th century CE marks the beginning of another era. The Gupta monarchs were powerful till the 6th century in North India. Art, science and literature flourished greatly during their time. The iconographic canons of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist divinities were perfected and standardised, which served as ideal models of artistic expression for later centuries, not only in India but also beyond its border. It was an age of all round perfection in domestic life, administration, literature, as seen in the works of Kalidasa, in art creations and in religion and philosophy, as exemplified in the wide-spread Bhagavata cult, which identified itself with an intensive cult of beauty.

With the Gupta period India entered upon the classical phase of sculpture. By the efforts of the centuries, techniques of art were perfected, different types were evolved, and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision. There was no more groping in the dark, no more experimentation. A thorough intelligent grasp of the true aims and essential principles of art, a highly developed aesthetic sense, and masterly execution by skilled hands produced those remarkable images which were to be the ideal and despair of the Indian artists of subsequent ages. The Gupta sculptures (fig.4.5 and 4.6) not only remained models of Indian art for all time to come but they also served as ideals for the Indian colonies in the Far East.

In the Gupta period all the trends and tendencies of the artistic pursuits of the proceeding phases reached their culmination in a unified plastic tradition of supreme importance in Indian History. Gupta sculpture thus is the logical outcome of the early classical sculpture of Amravati and Mathura. Its plasticity is derived from that of Mathura and its elegance from that of Amravati. Yet a Gupta sculpture seems to belong to a sphere that is entirely different. The Gupta artist seems to have been working for a higher ideal. A new orientation in the attitude towards art is noticed in the attempt to establish a closer harmony between art and thought, between the outer forms and the inner intellectual and spiritual conception of the people.

The art of Bharhut, Amravati, Sanchi and Mathura came closer and closer; melting into one. In the composition, it is the female figure that now becomes the focus of attraction and nature recedes into the background, but in doing so it leaves behind its unending and undulating rhythm in the human form. The human figure, taken as the image, is the pivot of Gupta sculpture. A new canon of beauty is evolved leading to the emergence of a new aesthetic ideal. This ideal is based upon an explicit understanding of the human body in its inherent softness and suppleness. The soft and pliant body of the Gupta sculpture with its smooth and shining texture, facilitates free and easy movement, and though seemingly at rest the figure seems to be infused with an energy that proceeds from within.

This is true not only of the images of divine beings, Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain but also of ordinary men and women. It is the sensitiveness of the plastic surface that the artist seeks to emphasise and for this; all superfluities, such as elaborate draperies, jewellery, etc., that tend to conceal the body, are reduced to the minimum. The wet or

transparent clinging drapery hence became the fashion of this age. But the sensuous effect of these draperies especially in the case of female figures was restrained by a conscious moral sense, and nudity as a rule was eliminated from Gupta sculpture. The great artistic creations of the period were invested with sweet and soft contours, restrained ornamentation and dignified repose. Under the patronage of the Guptas, the studies of Mathura and Sarnath produced several works of great merit. Though Hindu by faith, they were tolerant rulers.

The magnificent red sandstone image of the Buddha from Mathura is a most remarkable example of Gupta workmanship datable to the 5th century CE. The great Master, in all his sublimity, is here shown standing with his right hand in *abhayamudra*, assuring protection, and the left holding the hem of the garment. The smiling countenance with down-cast eyes is robed in spiritual ecstasy. The robe covering both shoulders is skilfully represented with delicately covered schematic folds and clings to the body. The head is covered with schematic spiral curls with a central protuberance and the elaborate halo decorated with concentric bands of graceful ornamentation.

The Mathura School of Art

Mathura was very important from the cultural point of view. Ptolemy mentions it as Modoura³ As the birth place of Lord Krishna it is an important pilgrimage for Hindus. In the Mahabharat period it was the capital of Shursen dynasty and the hub of the contemporary political activities. Buddha visited the city but was not welcomed warmly. Avantipura had the religious conversation with Mahakatyayna, the disciple of the Buddha. MadhuriyaSuttanta speaks that During Avantipura's period Buddhism gained a strong foothold in Mathura. Divyavdan refers that Ashoka provided special facilities as Upagupta, his Dhamma preceptor belonged to Mathura. Ashoka created stupas at several places with the advice of Upagupta. The Chinese traveller mentions about stupas at Mathura built by Ashoka. Not only Brahmanism and Buddhism but Jainism also flourished at Mathura.⁴ Jain community was very prosperous and all the 24 Tirthankaras were worshiped at Mathura.

The political history of Mathura can be traced back from c. 5th century BC as the capital of one of the mahajanpadas, Shursena ruled by the Andhaka -Vrishni clan

according to Panini's *Ashtadhyayi*. The *Arthashastra* also refers to VasudevKrisna as the chief of the clan. Megasthenese, the Greek ambassador to the court of Chandragupta Maurya also mentions about Krishna's worship at Mathura. Mathura was under the Mauryan Empire during the Mauryan era. When we find the ancient stone-carvers of India in full activity, we observe that they are very industriously engaged in carrying out the strange undertaking of representing the life of Buddha without Buddha.⁵

The first three centuries of the Christian era saw the golden period of the Mathura school of sculpture. Images in the mottled red sandstone found nearby Sikri and widely distributed over north central India, attesting to Mathura's importance as an exporter of sculpture.

The Mathura school was contemporaneous with a second important school of Kushana art, that of Gandhara in the northwest. About the 1st century CE each area appears to have evolved separately its own representations of the Buddha. The Mathura images are related to the earlier *yaksha* (male nature deity) figures, a resemblance particularly evident in the colossal standing Buddha images of the early Kushana period.

In these, and in the more representative seated Buddhas, the overall effect is one of enormous energy. The shoulders are broad, the chest swells, and the legs are firmly planted with feet spaced apart. Other characteristics are the shaven head; the *ushnisha* (protuberance on the top of the head) indicated by a tiered spiral; a round smiling face; the right arm raised in *abhaya-mudra* (gesture of reassurance); the left arm akimbo or resting on the thigh; the drapery closely moulding the body and arranged in folds over the left arm, leaving the right shoulder bare; and the presence of the lion throne rather than the lotus throne. Later, the hair began to be treated as a series of short flat spirals lying close to the head, the type that came to be the standard representation throughout the Buddhist world.

Jaina and Hindu images of the period are carved in the same style, and the images of the JainaTirthankaras, or saints, are difficult to distinguish from contemporary images of the Buddha, except by reference to iconography. The dynastic portraits produced by the Mathura workshops are of special interest. These rigidly frontal figures of

Kushana kings are dressed in Central Asian fashion, with belted tunic, high boots, and conical cap, a style of dress also used for representations of the Hindu sun god, Surya.

The female figures at Mathura, carved in high relief on the pillars and gateways of both Buddhist and Jaina monuments, are frankly sensuous in their appeal. These delightful nude or semi-nude figures are shown in a variety of toilet scenes or in association with trees, indicating their continuance of the *yakshi* (female nature deity) tradition seen also at other Buddhist sites, such as Bharhut and Sanchi. As auspicious emblems of fertility and abundance they commanded a popular appeal that persisted with the rise of Buddhism in the realm of artistic activities.

The new ideals of Mahayana Buddhism inspired the sculptors. According to Indian authorities, the creation of the Buddha image was the greatest contribution of the artists of this school. The tradition of this school extended to not only the images of Buddha but to the images of the Hindu pantheon of gods. Unlike the Gandhara School, this school was purely indigenous in its origins and reached its zenith. The image of the Buddha was usually carved out of white-spotted sandstone and was characterised by - curly hair, roundness of flesh, transparent drapery with visible folds and a profusely decorated halo behind the head. This school drew inspiration from Jainism as well as Iranian and Greco-Roman styles.

Striking remains show a female figure from the railings of a stupa, probably Jaina. Richly jewelled, figures exaggeratedly broad of hip and slender of waist, with their graceful, almost provocative, attitude, these sculptures exemplify the remarkable ancient Indian outlook on life which did not see anything incongruous in the juxtaposition of frank sensuality with the piety and renunciation of the monastery. Mathura sculpture developed indigenously and later cross-fertilized with Gandhara art. Body details were not as expressly carved as Gandhara and images were fleshy, but halo was profusely decorated. Examples are Sarvatobhadrika, etc. A headless statue of Kanishka was found in Mathura.

Important characteristics of Mathura School of Art:

- Buddhist to Brahmanical to sometimes secular theme.
- More stress is given to the inner beauty and facial emotions rather than bodily gesture.

- Sculptures were made on White-spotted red stones.
- These were not influenced by Greco-Roman techniques to that extent.
- Several Brahmanical deities were first crystallized by this school.
- They were depicted as more human and less spiritual. It was wholly influenced by Indian sculptures.
- In Mathura art tradition, Buddha image has longer earlobes, thicker lips, wider eyes and prominent noses.

Both Gandhara and Mathura (fig. 4.1) Art schools reached peak during Kanishka. The Kushana art of Mathura is important in the history of Indian art as it embodies the symbolism and iconographic forms that were adopted later.

The Gandhara School of Art

From the 1st century CE there is a strong school of Buddhist sculpture what is now - northwest Pakistan. Known by the ancient name of Gandhara, this region is open to foreign influences arriving along the newly opened Silk Road. One such influence from the west is the Roman and Greek realism in art. The region came under the political influence of a variety of kingdoms - Greek, Mauryan, Parthian, Kushan, Synthian and this resulted in the emergence of a mixed school of art, which borrowed, from various traditions of art. This school contributed to development of Buddha's image, which was usually carved out of grey slate stone and was characterised by Hellenistic features. These include - wavy hair in a top knot, sometimes a moustache on the face, *urna* (a dot or third eye) (fig.4.2) between the eyebrows, garment with thick pleats usually covering both shoulders styled like a roman toga, plain halo behind the head and muscular formation of the body. The expression of the image of Buddha is calmness and is the centre of attraction. In Gandhara sculpture, this realism is subtly combined with the local traditions of India to produce Buddhist images of an elegantly classical kind.(fig. 4.3)

Gandhara art presents some of the earliest images of the Buddha. The Gandhara art flourished during the Kushana rule in India. It was during his reign that Gandhara School of art flourished. According to V. A. Smith, the Gandhara style of art that developed in sculpture was a fusion of Greco-Roman and Indian styles.” In its aesthetic ideals, Gandhara art had nothing in common with Greco - Roman art.

Gandhara art infiltrated into India proper as far as Saurashtra and Gujarat and the great mercantile town of Mathura on the Yamuna. Earlier at Bharhut and Sanchi, the Buddha's presence was represented by symbols, the *pipal* tree, the wheel of life, footprints, and an empty throne.

Stupas and monasteries were adorned with relief friezes, often carved in dark schist, showing figures in classical poses with flowing Hellenistic draperies. The most notable of the Gandhara icons was that of the Buddha seated in the position of a yogi. Dressed in a monk's garment, his head displays the signs of his supernatural powers - the large ears, the third eye on his forehead, Gandhara sculpture has survived dating from the first to probably as late as the sixth or even the seventh century in a remarkably homogeneous style. Gandhara became roughly a Holy Land of Buddhism and excluding a handful of Hindu images, sculpture took the form either of Buddhist sect objects, Buddha and Bodhisattvas, or of architectural embellishment for Buddhist monasteries.

Gandhara sculpture primarily comprised Buddhist monastic establishments. These monasteries provided a never-ending gallery for sculptured reliefs of Buddha and Bodhisattvas.

In Gandhara art the descriptive friezes were all but invariably Buddhist, and hence Indian in substance - one depicted a horse on wheels nearing a doorway, which might have represented the Trojan horse affair. The Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, familiar from the previous Greek-based coinage of the region, appeared once or twice as standing figurines, presumably because as a pair, they tallied an Indian *mithuna* couple. There were also female images, corresponding to city goddesses.

On occasions, standing figures, even the Buddha, deceived the elusive stylistic actions of the Roman sculptor, seeking to express majesties. The drapery was fundamentally Western - the folds and volume of dangling garments were carved with realness and gusto - but it was mainly the persistent endeavours at illusionism, though frequently obscured by unrefined carving, which earmarked the Gandhara sculpture as based on a western classical visual impact.

The distinguishing Gandhara sculpture is the standing or seated Buddha. This represents the necessary nature of Gandhara art, in which a religious and an artistic

content, drawn from widely varied cultures have been bonded. The iconography is purely Indian. The seated Buddha is mostly cross-legged in the established Indian manner. Buddha is clothed either in waves or in taut curls over his whole head. The extended ears are merely due to the downward thrust of the heavy earrings worn by a prince or royal people; the distortion of the ear lobes is especially visible in Buddha, who, in Gandhara, never wore ear-rings or ornaments of any kind.

Gandhara art also had developed at least two species of image in which Buddha is the fundamental figure of an event in his life, distinguished by accompanying figures and a detailed scene and back-ground. The small statues of the visitors emerge below, an elephant describing Indra. The more general among these detailed images, of which approximately 30 instances are known, is presumably related with the Great Miracle of Sravasti. In one such example, one of the adjoining Bodhisattvas is distinguished as Avalokiteshwara by the tiny seated Buddha in his headgear. Other features of these images include the unreal species of tree above Buddha, the spiky lotus upon which he sits, and the effortlessly identifiable figurines of Indra and Brahma on both sides. And the protuberance on his head, indicating that, he hears all, sees all and knows all.

Gandhara art represents a fusion of native and foreign elements. The great strength of the classical elements in the art of the Gandhara province is best seen in portrait heads and the representations of classical deities which found their way into the Buddhist art of north-western India.⁶ “Indian iconography dominates, but foreign elements are conspicuous. In fact the Hellenistic-Roman elements are proposed to form the basis for the artist’s conceptions and design....although the Halo and the fold of drapery at Mathura might have been connected or borrowed to some extent from Gandhara. It is very likely that Buddhist iconography while dominating at Gandhara might have accepted certain iconographic concepts of the west- from Greece or Rome”

The same influence is also seen in the relief carvings which, both in their artistic style and in much of their iconographical detail, are closely related to Roman relief sculptures of imperial times. The position of the figures, the treatment of the body and the architectural forms used are all clearly derived from Roman models.

Most of the Gandharan reliefs portray episodes from the life of the Buddha or scenes from Buddhist legends. In contrast to the Buddha who is always represented as

wearing a monk's garment and having short hair, the bodhisattvas or Buddhist saints are shown with a bare upper body, skirt, scarves, jewels and long hair. This contrast between the Buddha as the sacred being who has achieved Enlightenment, and the bodhisattva who is on the road to this goal, is found in the Buddhist art of entire Asia.

In the Indian context, the style of Gandhara has a 'rather insipid flavour'. The Buddha images lack the spirituality of the images of the Gupta period. However, it would be only fair to note that the images have a gentle, graceful and compassionate look about them. There are two phases in the development of this school: the first in stone and second (from about the fourth century onwards) in stucco. Gandhara sculptors made images of Lord Buddha in the Greco-Roman style. The images of Buddha resembled Greek God Apollo.

Main features of Gandhara School of art :

- Theme is mainly Buddhist, depicting various stories from the life of Buddha.
- Also, more stress is given to the bodily features and external beauty.
- Sculptures were made initially on stone and later on Stucco, both greys in colour.
- This school is influenced by Greco-Roman techniques to a greater extent.
- One of the reasons is definitely the geographical location of the school.
- Art was the depiction of human body in a realistic manner with greater physical accuracy elaborate ornamentation and complex symbolism.
- Gandhara School was heavily influenced by Greek methodologies, the figures were more spiritual and sculpted mainly in grey, and great detail was paid to exact depiction of body parts.

The Amaravati School Of Art

One more important stage of development in sculptural history is marked during the Satavahana period. The Satavahana rulers are popular for their contribution to Buddhist art and architecture. In places like Goli, Jaggayapeta, Ghantasala, Bhattiprolu, Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, the Satavahana sculptures representing the Amaravati school of Art.

The Amaravati School (fig.4.4) has started the practice of depicting the Buddha as a divine being and receiving worship. The iconic presentation of Buddha was common

in Satavahana period. The Buddhist themes dominate the entire picture of artistic creations. Throughout the sculptures the main theme is to show various episodes revolving around the Buddha and his life. But the outstanding example of the sculpture of Satavahana period is the depiction of the 'Enlightened Buddha.' The images of Buddha are mainly in the '*sthanaka*' i.e. standing or '*asana*' i.e. sitting position and marvellously portray a serene oval face of Buddha with a moderately built body. The images in sitting position show striking similarity with each other in carving rounded shoulders. In many images, the right hand of Buddha holds up to give a symbolic gesture of '*abhaya*' means protection - or '*pravachana*' means preaching.

The Satavahana sculptures at Amaravati reflect the influence of both the Gandhara and the Mathura school of Art. Eroticism is also a predominant feature of these Satavahana sculptures. Spontaneous energy, grace, and dynamism ooze out of the carved stone figures. The initial style of sculpture underwent sea change when this school started depicting Gautama Buddha in human form.

The theme of nature and related things are most charmingly depicted through the art of carving with emphasizing on vigour, activity, and grace. The erotic sculptures are less in numbers but can be marked with their presence. One of the main features of Satavahana sculptures is that these are not iconic. Satavahana denies any representation in human form.

The Sculpture of Buddha in cave 10 at Ajanta shows Buddha as seated on a cushion and wearing red robe. On his forehead a *chandan*(sandal) mark is noted. He is shown as surrounded by standing monks and householders. The Satavahanas created a tradition in the art of painting from Ajanta.

Some of the striking pieces of this school are the statues of VemaKadphises and Kanishka, *torana* tympanum with the worship of Buddhist symbols, a seated Kubera, and several other Buddhist deities. The sculptures form the high watermark of this school and the most outstanding in the whole of India. A new feature, absent in the earlier sculptures of Amaravati, is the delineation of different planes. The figures of the first plane are carved in deep relief, and the depth of cutting gradually diminishes with the successive planes.

Most remarkable of all is the skill displayed in representation of scenes of action. This is clear from the story of Udayan a, the story of the subjugation of the elephant Nalagiri by the Buddha, portraying the confusion created by the elephant running amok in the streets of Rajagriha and the lively battle scene from the coping. In this period the symbol most often used is a flaming pillar above the paired feet resting on a lotus base and crowned by a *trishula*.

The casing slabs of the fourth period, 200 - 250 CE show richer and elaborate carvings than the rail. The figures in the sculptures of this period tend to grow taller and slimmer. Also, one sees the finest miniature sculptures on the small circular bosses, in the friezes and on the casing slabs.

The statues of the Buddha dating from the third century CE are magnificent and powerful creations. They are severe, but the features are full and the body is far from slender, the expression aristocratic and benign. The head is crowned with short curly hair.

The sculptures of Nagarjunikonda on the light- green limestone were a sequel to the Amaravati School and had their beginning contemporary with the third period of Amaravati art. The panels on the carved vertical slabs contained scenes illustrating the Jatakas.

Among the events of Buddha's life, the most popular to be depicted, are his descent from heaven in the form of a white elephant, queen Maya's conception, the casting of his horoscope after his birth, the great renunciation, the transportation of Gautam's head-dress to heaven, the scene of temptation, the Naga- Muchalinda protecting the Buddha from rain with broad hood, the first sermon, and the *mahaparinirvana* represented by the *stupa*.

A great number of graceful and elongated figures on the reliefs imbue a sense of life and action that is unique in Indian art, not only that each figures looks as an animation by an internal vitality, the quality of the surface further enhances the action of having a glued quality reminding one of water-worn pebbles.

One of the great stupa railing (probably of the 3rd century CE.) show the Buddha in Human form subduing a maddened elephant which had been sent by his jealous

cousin, Devadatta, to attack him. In the field of sculpture a round figure appears belonging to the 3rd century of CE. It has a certain modulation of the flowing sculptural volume and illusion of life, both hallmarks of the late Amaravati School.

All the railings of the Amaravati stupa are made out of marble while the dome itself is covered with slabs of the same material. Unfortunately, the entire stupa is in ruins. Fragments of its railings have been partly taken to the British Museum. The sculptures of the stupa are quite different in style from those of northern India. The figures of Amaravati have slim blithe features and they are represented in most difficult poses and curves. However, as the scenes are mostly over-crowded, the general effect is not very pleasing. Indeed one characteristic of Amaravati is not disputed. The technical excellence of sculptures in carving plants and flowers, particularly the lotuses at Amaravati are most admirably represented in this school. The Buddha is mostly represented by symbols.

It is only recently excavations have revealed art works at Nagarjunakonda. Slabs of limestone illustrate scenes from the Buddha's life.

Main Features of Amaravati School of Art:

- Its sculptures show a mastery of stone sculpture. The Andhra sculpture is generally known as Amaravati schools.
- The stupas at Amaravati were made of a distinctive green marble probably it was began about the time of Christ, and received its final carved faces and railings from about 150 CE. to 200 CE.
- Buddha has been depicted in divine form.
- The nature art of Amaravati region is one of India's major and distinct styles.

The Sarnath School of Art

Mostly in 5th century, chunar sandstone was used and localised around Sarnath. Most remarkable example of this School is sitting Buddha in *Dharchakrapravartan* mode with legs crossed and drapery shown as transparent. The back of the throne is

decorated with motifs. Now many art works (fig.4.5) are preserved in Sarnath museum.

The image of the standing Buddha is an excellent example of Gupta art in its maturity from Sarnath. The softly moulded figure has its right hand in the attitude of assuring protection. Unlike the delicately carved drapery folds of the Mathura Buddha, only the fringe of the diaphanous robe is here indicated. The perfect execution of the figure matched by its serene spiritual expression is truly worthy of the sublime being.

Sarnath introduces not only a delicacy and refinement of form but also a relaxed attitude by bending the body in the case of the standing figure, slightly on its own axis, thus imparting to it a certain litheness and movement in contrast to the columnar rigidity of similar Mathura works. Even in the case of the seated figure, the slender physiognomy conveys a feeling of movement, the body, closely following the modelling in all its subtle nuances. The folds have been discarded altogether; an indication of the drapery only survives in the thin lines on the body suggesting the edges of the garment. The folds that fall apart are given, again, a firmly muslin-like texture. The body in its smooth and shining plasticity constitutes the principal theme of the Sarnath artists.

The culmination of these characteristics seen in this sublime image of the Master represented in the act of turning the Wheel of Law is one of the masterly creations of Gupta classical sculpture. The image is carved in Chunar sandstone and has a surface texture of shining smoothness. The Master is shown as seated in *Vijraparyanka* with the hands held near the breast in *Dharmachakrapravartana Mudra* (the gesture of Preaching). A subtle discipline permeates the entire figure, physically as well as mentally. This is evident as much in the smooth and rhythmic treatment of the body as in the ethereal countenance suggestive of a mind absorbed and in serene enjoyment of spiritual bliss. A purely decorative background is supplied by the throne, lintel with *makara* ends, and a circular nimbus (*Prabha*) exquisitely carved with a broad foliated ornament within beaded borders. The decorative *prabhas*, it should be noted here, are characteristic also of Mathura images.

During the Gupta period the characteristic elements of the Indian temple emerged and the plastic forms began to be used admirably as an integral part of the general

architectural scheme. The stone carving from the temples at Deogarh and those from the temples of Udayagiri and Ajanta are excellent specimens of figure sculpture in their decorative setting. The large panel of *Sheshashayi Vishnu* from the Deogarh temple, representing the Supreme being slumbering wakefully on the serpent Ananta, the symbol of eternity, in the interval between the dissolution of the universe and its new creation, is a magnificent example.

The Western Indian School of Art

The identification of Western Indian School of sculpture was put at first by Taranath (16th century Tibetan Buddhist author). Taranath wrote in chapter 44 of his *History* about a short passage on image- making that is “during the period of king Shila, there was an extraordinarily skilled icon-maker called Shrigadhari, Who was born in the region of Maru. He made many sculptures and paintings in the tradition of the Yakshas.

The school following his technique is known as the school of old Western Indian Art.” U.P. Shah and Khandalavala made many conclusions regarding Western Indian Art observing Devni Mori, Kanheri, Karla and the Gana images of Shamlaji. All these represent a “kshatrapa or at least pre – Gupta origin and achievements in art”⁷. While Khandalavala assumes Shila of Kannauj dated c. 7th century CE⁸, Shah assumes Shiladiya the late Maitrakaking of Valabhi who ruled from c. 580 - 613- CE⁹. According to Taranath Western Indian school of art flourished in 6th century.

The Western Indian School of Art emphasized on curves and stiffened limbs. Its examples are recovered from the sites of Nagri, Akota, Sodani, and Shamlaji in Gujarat. The Vakatakas were paramount in the Deccan, contemporary with the Guptas in the North. The high watermark of perfection in art achieved in their region can be best seen in the later caves at Ajanta, the early ones at Ellora and those at Aurangabad.

Although the period under review is not known for architecture, there came into existence beautiful temples and monasteries. The famous tower of Kanishka of Peshawar was one of the wonders of Asia. Unfortunately, no trace has been left behind.

All these art schools were mostly inspired by religion and have left behind a rich heritage. “The Art of India constitutes a unique chapter in the history of human endeavour”¹⁰. It unveils the deepest recesses of the human mind and offers a mirror to the Indian soul. The spiritual and religious dimensions of India’s creative genius has found full and perfect expression in the myriad aesthetic creations.

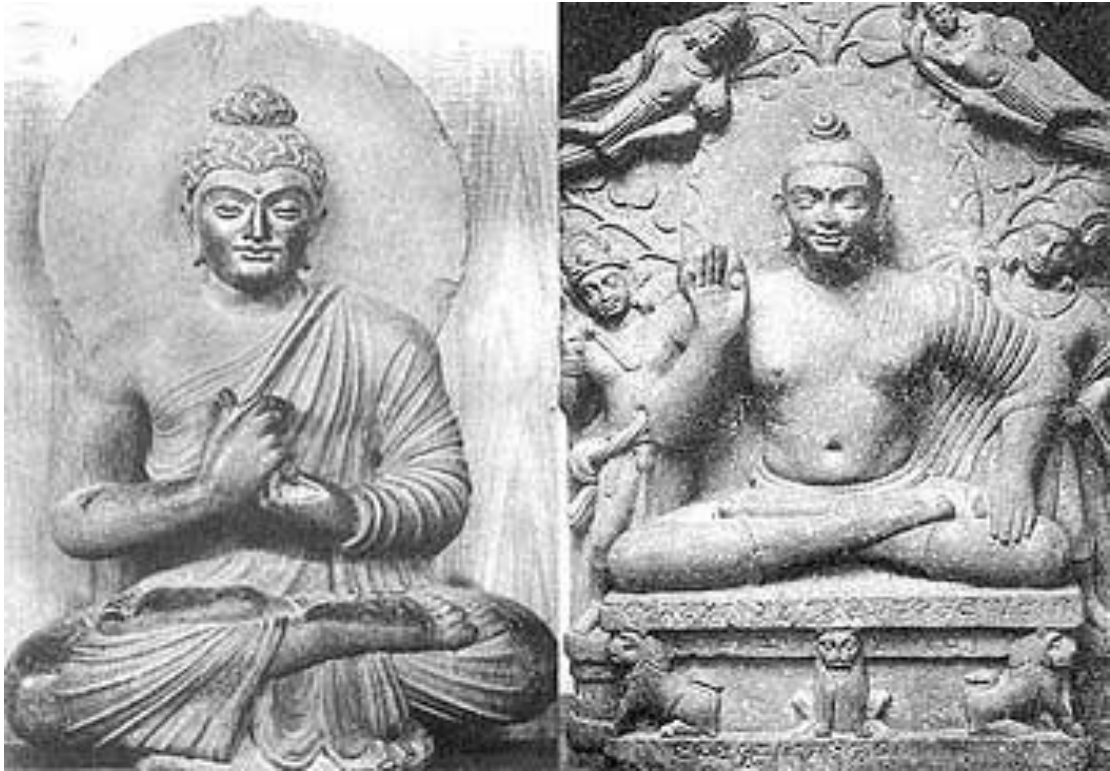


Fig. 4.1, Gandhara Art and Mathura Art



Fig. 4.2, Lord Buddha, Gandhara Sculpture



Fig. 4.3, Early Mahayana Buddhist triad. From left to right, a Kushan devotee, Metreya, the Buddha, Avalokiteshwara and a Buddhist monk. 2nd –3rd century, Gandhara.



Fig. 4.4, Amaravati School



Fig. 4.5, Panel showing Buddha's life Gupta Age, c. 5th century from Sarnath School of Art.



Fig.4.6, Image of Buddha, Gupta Age, 5th cent. C.E.



Fig. 4.7, Buddha Figure 5th century C.E.

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