

**NEXT IAS**

# ART & CULTURE

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**Art & Culture**

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A

Section

Visual Arts

Indian architecture, an expression over space and time, has evolved through centuries. It is closely associated with its history, religion, culture, geography and socio-economic conditions. As India hosts diversity in the before mentioned respects, Indian architectural styles also shows diversities. In this chapter, this evolution will be discussed in details beginning from ancient Indian architecture to modern times.

The whole chapter is divided into three sections:

- Indian architecture in Ancient India
- Indian architecture in medieval times
- Modern Indian architecture

## 1.1 Indian Architecture in Ancient India

Although art forms like pottery, sculpture etc., had taken shape in prehistoric period, yet architecture in its present forms has its roots in Indus valley civilization in the form of town planning.

### Indus Valley Civilisation Architecture

- This period extending from 2600 BCE to 1900 BCE witnessed the development of some of the earliest big buildings in India. There are various important sites of Indus valley civilization each with its unique architectural features along with similarities. These sites possessed a flourishing urban architecture.

Some unique features of its urban architecture are:



Figure: Citadel of Indus Valley Civilisation

- In most sites, cities were divided into 2 parts:
  - ♦ **Citadel:** It is smaller and higher (standing some 40 to 50 feet above) than the rest of the area and situated on the western side of the town.
  - ♦ **Lower town:** It occupies much larger area as compared to citadel but is on a lower plain than citadel. It is situated on the eastern side. It is divided into wards like chess board
- Cities are in parallelogramic form laid out in a regular grid pattern.
- There were large-scale use of burnt bricks of standard dimensions (4×2×1) for purpose of construction and thus there was marked difference from expectations as there was absence of stone buildings:
  - ♦ These bricks were coated with plaster and also made water tight with natural tar or gypsum.
  - ♦ In Houses, kutcha bricks were used while in bathrooms and drains pucca bricks were used which were made waterproof by using gypsum.
- The cities comprised of well-planned and thought out architectural features:
  - ♦ Underground drainage with inspection holes – Drainage system has been the most striking feature of this civilization. Small drains ran from each house and were connected to drains running along the main roads. The inspection hole, where top cover was loosely attached, was mainly to allow regular cleaning and maintenance. The picture below depicts the drainage and houses.
  - ♦ The streets were all aligned from east to west or from north to south.



Figure: Drainage at Mohenjo Daro

- Citadel comprised various buildings like Great bath, pillared assembly halls, granaries etc.

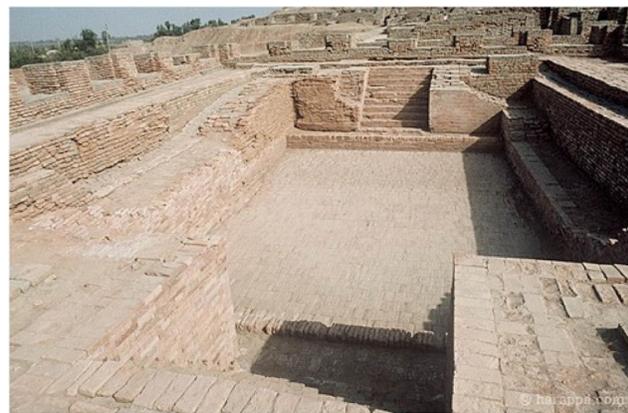


Figure: Great Bath, Mohenjo Daro

- ♦ **Great Bath:** Great bath, found at the site of Mohenjodaro, had an ingenious hydraulic system. It denotes the prevalence of public baths and thus importance of ritualistic cleansing in that era.
- ♦ The pool used to be in the centre of a large open quadrangle surrounded by rooms on all sides. It is connected to these rooms through a flight of steps at either end. The pool was fed by a well nearby and the dirty water was drained into the city's sewage system through a large corbelled drain.
- ♦ **Granaries:** The granaries were designed with strategic air ducts and raised platforms, giving us an idea of the intelligence behind its construction. The largest building in Mohenjodaro was granary. Some sites like Harappa had as many as six granaries.
- ♦ **Pillared Assembly Hall:** The pillared hall with twenty pillars arranged in rows of five probably carried a large roof supported on them. It might have served as the court of the city magistrate or as a secretariat of the State.



Figure: Pillared Assembly Hall

- Lower town had houses of various different sizes which, as some researchers believe that, showed people had different economic status. The class distinction between rich and poor existed where rich had private wells and toilets.
  - ♦ No house had windows opening up in the main street. Even entrance of the house was through sideways.
  - ♦ Most buildings were properly ventilated even as the constructions varied from a one-roomed building to even double-storied houses.
  - ♦ A house plan is shown in the given picture.

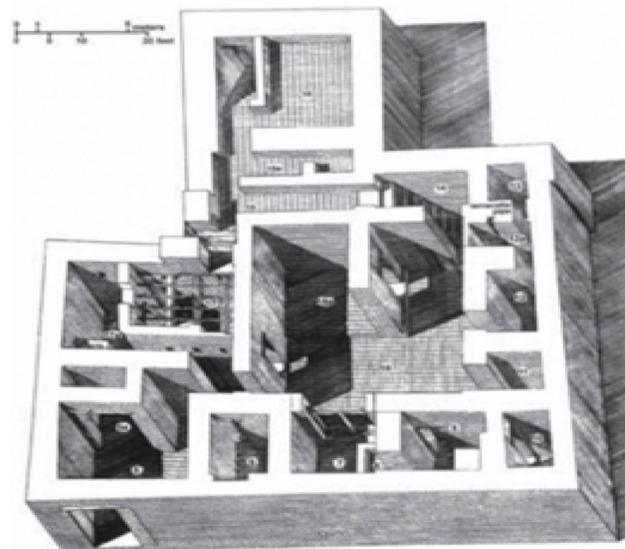


Figure: House Plan

**Other important findings are:**

- **Harappa**
  - ♦ Coffin burial.
  - ♦ Granary outside the fort.
  - ♦ Phallus worship.
  - ♦ Graveyard.
  - ♦ Mother goddess.

- **Mohenjo-Daro**
  - ♦ Prepared Garments.
  - ♦ Temple like Palace.
  - ♦ Pashupati seal.
  - ♦ Statue of a dancing girl.
  - ♦ Ivory weight balance.
  - ♦ The Great Bath.
  - ♦ The Great Granary.
  - ♦ Priest king statue.
- **Kalibangan**
  - ♦ Lower fortified town.
  - ♦ Fire Altar.
  - ♦ Boustrophedon style.
  - ♦ Wooden drainage.
  - ♦ Copper ox.
  - ♦ Evidence of earthquake.
  - ♦ Wooden plough.
  - ♦ Camel's bone.
- **Lothal**
  - ♦ Port Town.
  - ♦ Evidence of Rice.
  - ♦ Fire Altar.
  - ♦ Graveyard.
  - ♦ Ivory weight balance.
  - ♦ Copper dog.
- **Rangpur**
  - ♦ Evidence of Rice.
- **Surkotada**
  - ♦ Horse bone.
  - ♦ Stone covered grave.
- **Malavan**
  - ♦ Canals.
- **Chanhudaro**
  - ♦ Bangle factory.
  - ♦ Ink pot.
  - ♦ Only city without citadel.
  - ♦ Carts with seated driver.
- **Daimabad**
  - ♦ Bronze Buffalo.
- **Amri**
  - ♦ Actual remains of Rhinoceros.
- **Alamgirpur**
  - ♦ Impression of cloth on a trough.
- **Ropar**
  - ♦ Buildings made of stone and soil.
  - ♦ Dog buried with humans.
- ♦ One inscribed steatite seal with typical Indus pictographs.
- ♦ Oval pit burials.
- **Banawali**
  - ♦ Oval shaped settlement.
  - ♦ Only city with radial streets.
  - ♦ Toy plough.
  - ♦ Largest number of barley grains.
- **Dholavira**
  - ♦ Only site to be divided into three parts.
  - ♦ Giant water reservoir.
  - ♦ Unique water harnessing system.
  - ♦ Dams.
  - ♦ A stadium.

## 1.2 Mauryan Architecture

Mauryan empire which ruled over most of the Indian subcontinent from 321 BCE to 185 BCE contributed one of the earliest and greatest architectural marvels after Indus valley civilization. The architecture of this period comprised of pillars, stupas and caves which was built under the patronage of Mauryan rulers especially Ashoka. This period witnessed an important transition in Indian art from use of wood to stone. This is the reason perhaps no significant architectural remains are found corresponding to the period between Indus valley civilization and Mauryan period.

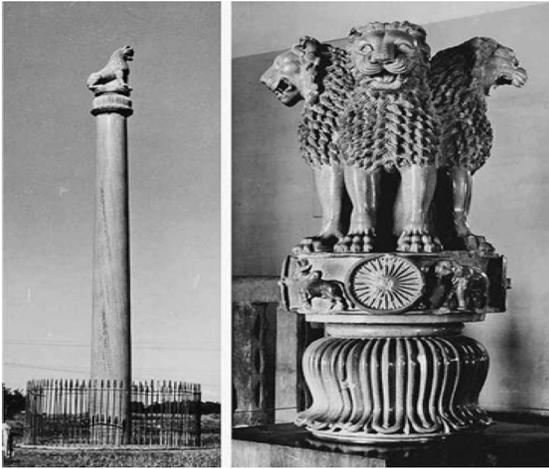
### Pillars

It comprises the most striking monuments of Mauryan. These are referred at some places as Pillars of Dharma. Some pillars marked the stages of Asoka's pilgrimage to various centers of Buddhism. The major structural features of pillars of this period are:

- **Free Standing Columns:** It means they were not used as supports to any structure
- **Four Parts:**
  - ♦ The shaft is polished monolith column made from one piece of stone. The polish gave the pillar a metallic tinge in spite of being made in stone.
  - ♦ The capital is a stone carved in the shape of an inverted lotus (bell capital).
  - ♦ A cylindrical bolt joins the top of the shaft to the capital
  - ♦ On top of capital is the abacus (platform) which supports the crowning animal or animals. The abacus is square and plain in earlier pillars and circular and carved in later ones.

**Other important features of pillar art are:**

- They are made of Chunar sand stone.



**Figure:** Ashokan Pillar and lion Capital

- They are considered to be monoliths – Thus it is different from Archaic pillars which are constructed in pieces.
- They do not have a base and the plain smooth circular shaft tapers slightly to upwards.
- All part of the pillars are carved in the round which means they are meant to be viewed same from all the directions.
- These columns were erected by Ashoka all over his empire either to mark a sacred site associated with Buddha’s life or to commemorate a great event. Various famous edicts of Ashoka have been inscribed on the pillars to propagate the Dhamma or the imperial sermons of Ashoka to his people. Some important information about these edicts is given in the box.

The Inscriptions on these edicts is deciphered by James Prinsep. Most edicts are in Pali language with Prakrit usage at some places

Script varies in different regions

- Northwest India : Kharoshti script
- West India : Gueek and Aramaic
- Rest of India : Brahmi script

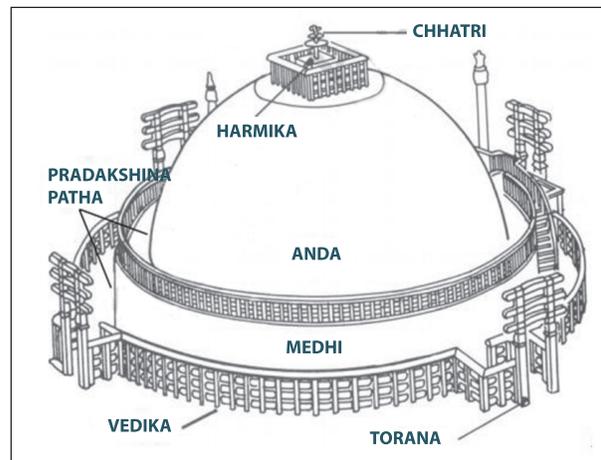
Some Asokan edicts in Kharoshti script shows the influence of Persian architecture. In fact, the very idea of issuing edicts is Iranian.

- The famous Sarnath pillar was built during this period which has a magnificent capital. It has been adopted as the emblem of the Modern Indian Republic. Its main features are
  - The lowest part of the capital is curved as an inverted lotus.

- Above it are four animals, an elephant, a horse, a bull and a lion. Each of these has a unique significance:
  - (a) **Lion:** The lion, unlike being a solar symbol in many ancient traditions, is a reference to the Buddha as he is referred to as Sakya Simha (lion among the sakyas)
  - (b) **Elephant:** It symbolises the birth of Buddha
  - (c) **Bull:** The bull is a symbol of fertility.
  - (d) **Spoked Wheel:** The wheels between the animal motifs almost appear to be pulling an invisible vehicle as if to perpetuate the wheel of Dhamma.
- Other important examples of pillar art of this period are - capitals of Vaishali, Lauriya Nandangarh, Rampurva pillars.

**Stupas**

- Inside the stupa, relics of Buddha were preserved in a casket in central hall. The stupa came to be accepted as a sort of architectural body representing the Buddha himself. The base of the stupa represents the crossed legs, the middle portion represents the body, and the top piece represents the head.



**Figure:** Stupa Architecture

- Stupas were a way used by King Ashoka to spread Buddhism. His dedication could be seen in building roughly 84,000 stupas across his empire. It was said that he divided the ashes of the Buddha’s earthly body amongst them.

The most famous stupa of this time is Sanchi Stupa.

**Its features are as follows:**

- Hemispherical dome truncated near the top known as Anda.
- The top of the dome was decorated by a wooden or stone umbrella denoting universal supremacy of Dharma:

- It comprises of three chatras which represents triratnas of Buddhism: Buddha, Dhama and Sangha
- These three are connected with each other through Danda.
- The core of the stupa is made of unburnt brick and the outer face of burnt brick covered with a thick layer of plaster
- The stupa is encircled by a path for pradakshina.

Another examples of some important stupas of this period are – Amravati stupa, Barhut Stupa in Rajasthan, Gandhara Stupa, Piprawaha stupa in UP.

### Caves

The caves, representing a wonderful specimen of Mauryan art, were constructed for the residence of monks. It represents the beginning of rock cut architecture. Their interior was polished like mirror.

Some examples of caves built in this period comprises - Barabar hill caves in the north of Gaya, Nagarjuni hill caves, Sudama caves, Gopi caves etc. The caves are simple in plan with plain but highly polished interiors. The only sculpture ornamentation is a relief carving on the doorway of a cave known as Lomas Rishi cave (same as barabar caves).



**Figure:** Lomas rishi cave, Barabar

The Barabar hill cave was donated by Asoka to Ajivika monks and some caves at Nagarjuni hills were donated by Dasharatha to them. The 4 caves in Barabar and 3 caves in Nagarjuni near Gaya in Bihar, together were known as 7 sisters.

### Palaces and residential buildings

The architecture of Mauryan Palaces and Residential buildings was so magnificent and of such high standard that Fa-Hien remarked that “no human hands of this world could accomplish this.”

The gilded pillars of the Mauryan palace were adorned with golden vines and silver birds.

One good example of this is the royal assembly building, situated in Kumhrar, which is a hall with numerous pillars. Wood was the principle building material.

## 1.3 Post-Mauryan Architecture

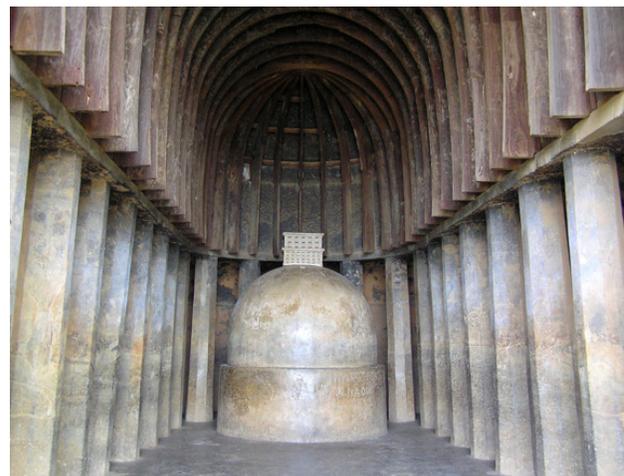
Post-Mauryan period roughly corresponds to the period from 200 BCE to 300 CE where rulers like Sungas, Satvahanas, Indo-greeks, Sakas, Kushanas ruled.

Post-Mauryan art is generally associated with following broad characteristics:

- It is structural art which means it was originally part of architectural structures like the gateways, railings and facades of stupas, chaityas, viharas and temples.
- It narrates or describes scenes from myths and legends associated with divine and semi-divine beings.
- It also depicts signs and symbols.
- It is regarded as more popular art than Mauryan representing the folk spirit of commoners.

In this period, caves and stupas continued with little differences from the past. Stupas got enlarged, their height was raised and gateways & toranas were beautifully carved now. Caves were now used for two purposes unlike earlier.

Chaityas to be used by monks as a prayer hall like Karle Chaitya in Maharashtra. The ancient rock-cut Buddhist caves of Ajanta were built during this period. They started carving from top of the hill and reach the bottom. Ajanta Cave 10 is thought to have the oldest Chaitya hall at Ajanta.



**Figure:** Karle Cave

Viharas to be used by monks as rest place or residence like Nashik Vihar, Ajanta caves. It used to look like rooms are built along a straight line with front pillars.



Figure: Ajanta Caves

## 1.4 Sangam Architecture

Sangam period roughly corresponds from 300 BCE to 300 CE. The major kingdoms of this period were early Cholas, Cheras and the Pandyan.

Example of temples built in this period are, the Saluvankuppan Murugan temple which consists of three layers, the Veetrirundha Perumal Temple at Veppathur dedicated to Lord Vishnu.



Figure: Remains of Saluvankuppan Murugan temple

## 1.5 Architecture in Gupta Age

Gupta period extends from 320 CE to 600 CE. This period is considered a golden age of artistic accomplishment. The Guptas were the first architects of Hindu temples. The temple architecture evolved from the earlier tradition of rock-cut shrines to the ones adorned with towers and elaborate carvings.

The evolution of temple architecture in this phase is elaborately discussed in the coming section.

## 1.6 Gupta Cave Shrines

The Gupta emperors built prodigiously across their empire but the oldest examples of structures built with a distinct religious and philosophical affiliation are cave shrines.

Cave shrines are rooms carved into flat rock walls for religious ceremonies or worship. These are generally associated with Hinduism, although some are Buddhist.

Relying on the solid rock for structural support, these shrines introduced Indian builders to many concepts of architectural stability and provided a massive canvas for reliefs.

Notable examples are found at Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. Here, in one shrine is one of the finest examples of Gupta art, the celebrated relief showing Vishnu in his incarnation as the boar-headed Varaha.



Figure: Udayagiri caves

The caves of the Buddhist and Hindus sects denote the architectural pattern of the Guptas.

Some features of the important caves developed during this period is given in the subsequent paragraphs

### Ajanta Caves

There are a total of 29 caves of which 25 were used as Viharas while 4 were used as Chaityas. Dating from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE to 7<sup>th</sup> century CE, they contain some of the earliest and finest examples of Indian wall-painting. The subject matter is largely scenes from the life of Buddha. Cave 1 contains some the Bhodisattva Padampani and Vajrapani paintings.

Cave 19 was built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE and has a Gupta-style chaitya (shrine) facade with columned porch and large, almost semi-circular aperture above. The whole facade is covered in rich carvings and relief panels showing scenes from Buddhist lore.



Figure: Ajanta Caves

- Ajanta Caves are located in the Aurangabad District of Maharashtra.
- The caves are built on perpendicular cliff, unlike Ellora (sloping sides). Since the caves are on perpendicular side there are not many chaityas.
- Fresco was another art technique which was prevalent in Gupta Architecture seen in the Ajanta Caves.
  - ♦ It first has a layer of clay mixed with cow dung and rice husk paste spread on rough surface.
  - ♦ It is followed by a coating of lime plaster.
  - ♦ Finally the surface is kept moist till the painting is done.
- Outlines for the same are in red and other colours. Blue is not seen in Ajanta.
- The theme for such art is usually Jataka which are tales regarding the previous births of Gautama Buddha.
- Fahein and Hiuen tsang are mentioned in Ajanta.
- Five caves are of Hinayana Buddhism and rest depict Mahayana Buddhism.
- Cave 16 is the most elegant of all. Famous paintings include – Dying Princess, Flying Apsara and Preaching Buddha.
- The interiors are covered with painted murals that feature superb figures drawn with a gracefully winding line.
- Large stone figures, stone and terra-cotta relief and large and small bronze statuettes are made in the refined Gupta style.
- The level of production is uniformly high.

### Ellora Caves

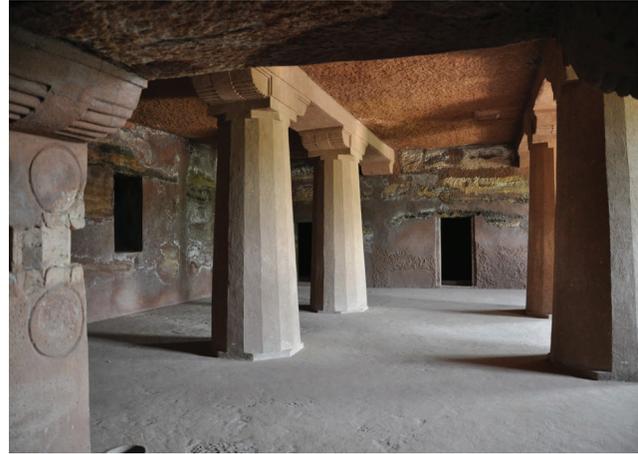
- Three religions are depicted in each of the 34 caves (17 Hinduism + 12 Buddhism + 5 Jainism).
- It is on the sloping side of the hill
- Contribution by Rashtrakuta is seen in these caves
- Cave 10 is a Chaitya for Lord Vishwakarma, Cave 14 depicts Ravana ki Khai, Cave 15 the Dashavatara Cave and Cave 16, the Kailasha Temple.
- Three storeyed caves are also present in Ellora.
- Two famous Jain caves are Indra Sabha and Jagannath Sabha.



**Figure:** Kailash Temple, Ellora

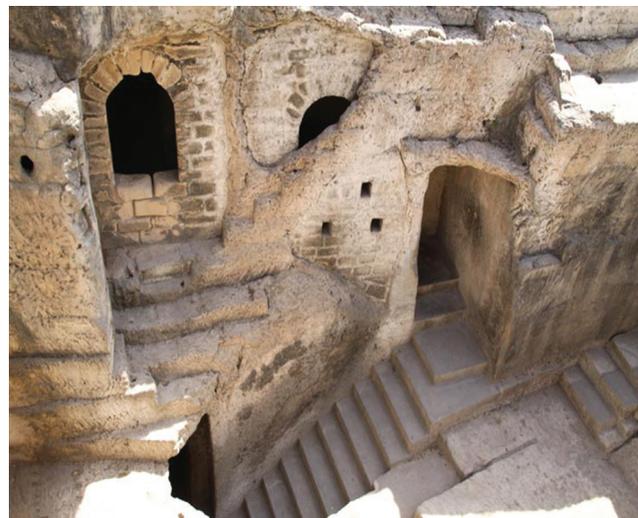
### Bagh Caves

- Located on the bank of the Bagh river in Madhya Pradesh.
- Group of 9 Buddhist caves developed around 6<sup>th</sup> century CE which are architecturally very similar to the Ajanta caves.



### Junagadh Caves

- These caves are found in Gujarat and are of Buddhist religion.
- They contain Uparkots which are 30-50ft high artificial platforms connected by a staircase to the hall.



### Nashik Caves

- There are 25 Buddhist Caves belonging to Hinayana
- They date back to First Century CE
- It is also called Pandava Leni.
- The spiritual presence of Buddha is denoted by a Throne and footprints.
- Most of the caves are Viharas except for the 18<sup>th</sup> cave which is a Chaitya.



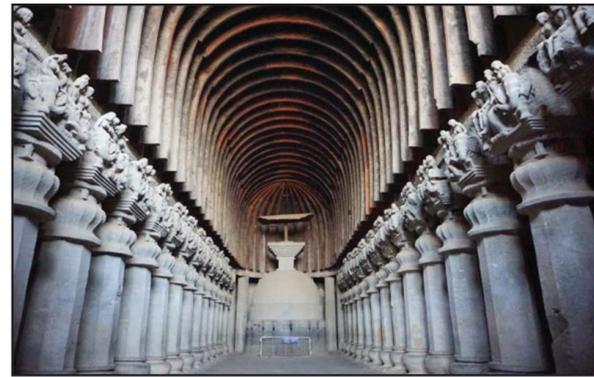
**Montperir Caves/Mandapeshwar**

- These caves are located near Mount Poinsur in Borivali, and were originally on the banks of River Dhaisa.
- An Eighth Century cut rock, dedicated to Shiva can be found in these caves.
- There is an open ground in front of the caves which is used as a playground and parking area by slum-dwellers from the slum in front of it.
- This was converted into a Christian Cave by the Portuguese.



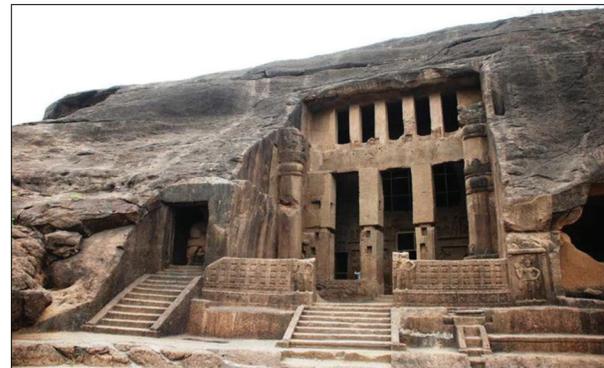
**Karle Cave**

- Carved from the living rock
- Columns are strong and bulky, surmounted by sculptured capitals
- A stupa with a wooden umbrella on top unharmed to this date
- Largest Chaitya-Griha among all Buddhist monuments in India
- Has a huge lion pillars in front of Chaitya-Griha (only two caves have this design- Karla and Kanheri)



**Kanheri Cave**

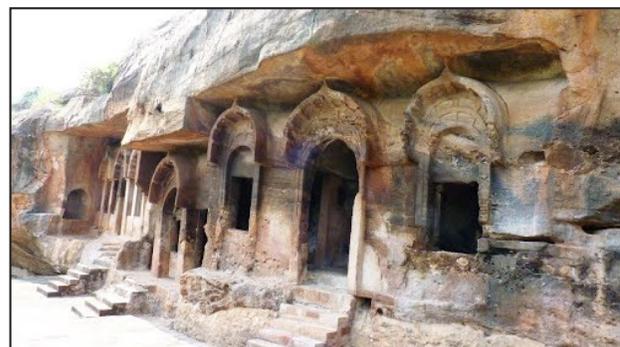
- Second largest Chaitya-Griha in India, after Karle caves.
- Lion Pillars at the Entrance. (Just like Karle caves)
- Podhis: water cisterns for rainwater harvesting
- Images of both Standing Buddha and sitting Buddha flanked by Bodhisattvas
- Famous Satvahan king Gautamiputra Satakarni's name mentioned in the inscriptions here



**Cave Architecture in Eastern India**

**Guntapalle in Andhra Pradesh**

The cave is relatively small when compared to the caves of Western India. Perhaps it is among the very unique sites where the structured Stupas, Viharas and the caves are excavated at one place.



## 1.7 Temple Architecture

The Gupta Age, being an age of intense religion interests, saw the construction of many temples and religious architectures dedicated to various Hindu Gods such as Shiva, Vishnu, Surya, Kartikeya etc. Unfortunately, the Huna invaders destroyed most of those works and many disappeared under the ravages of time as well.

It is perhaps important to note here that Hindu temples were not designed for congregations but rather as the dwelling place of a deity. This decorated palace allowed priests to give offerings to the gods. Individuals could also offer prayers, flowers, and food (puja) to a sacred relic or statue representing a particular god. Believers would also walk around the temple in a ritual act of worship.

### Features of Gupta Temple Architecture

- The Gupta monuments were built under the Puranic religious concepts.
- They represented both balance and beauty.
- They maintained external decorations of a higher order both in brick temples and stone.
- The Gupta style was influenced by Kusana, Mathura, and Gandhara and borrowed the common features of T-shaped doorways, decorated door jambs, sculpted panels with high-relief figures, and laurel-wreath and acanthus motifs.
- In Gupta architecture the square was considered the most perfect form and temples were designed to be appreciated from all sides.
- They were constructed using sandstone, granite, and brick.

A few notable examples of Gupta architecture worth mentioning are elaborated below:

### Dashavatara Temple at Deogarh

- It is considered the best because of its beautiful sculpture with many figures.
- At Deogarh the platform had reliefs running around it depicting scenes from the Ramayana epic poem.
- In the centre of the jagati stood the principle shrine, which was without windows and accessed by a flight of steps on all four sides. This is known as Panchayatana style.



- Four lesser shrines stand at each corner of the complex.
- The doorway to the square sanctuary tower of the Dashavatara temple is a fine example and carries sculpture of Vishnu, Brahma, Indra, Ganga, and Yamuna, as well as attendants and mithuna couples.
- The temple also carries one of the most famous sculptural panels from ancient India, the Vishnu Anantasayana panel (shown in image below).
- The scene contains many gods but is dominated by a sleeping Vishnu who rests on the multi-headed serpent Ananta and floats on the waters of oblivion whilst from his navel sprouts a lotus leaf on which sits Brahma, the god of creation.
- Besides the structures in stones, the Gupta temple-architecture was also erected in brick. Among the brick temples, the most famous one is the temple at Bhitargaon in Kanpur district of Uttar Pradesh.

### Bhitargaon Temple

The temple at Bhitargaon in Uttar Pradesh is one of the most complete surviving Gupta temples. It is a rare early example of a Hindu temple constructed entirely of brick, dating to the late 5th century CE. Although damaged in its upper portion, the four-sided and curved shikhara tower of the temple maintains its gavaksha niches and shallow pilasters which diminish in size as the tower rises to a pinnacle. These and the decorated capitals create frames in which were once set terracotta panels.



Few panels survive intact but examples from other sites demonstrate that they would have once shown lively scenes from mythology, in particular figures of river goddesses.

## 1.8 Evolution of Temple Architecture in Gupta Period

### Stage 1

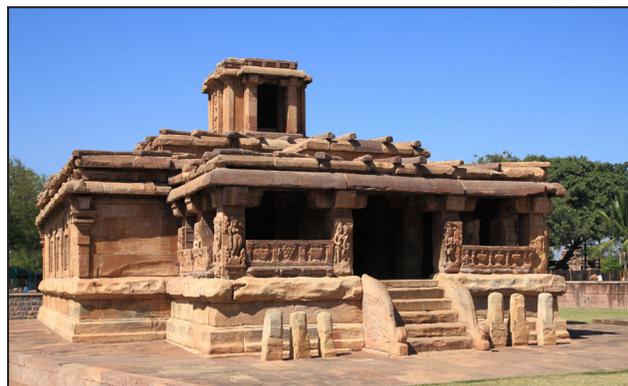
- Square building with flat roof and shallow pillared porch
- The nucleus of a temple - the sanctum or cella (garbagriha) with a single entrance and a porch (mandapa) appears for the first time here.
- **Example:** The Kankali Devi temple at Tigawa and the Vishnu and Varaha temples at Eran.



**Figure:** Varaha Temple, Eran

### Stage 2

- In the Second stage Flat Roof and square temple continued and so did the pillar approach except it wasn't shallow.
- An elaboration of the first type with the addition of an ambulatory (pradakshina) around the sanctum and sometimes a second storey
- The temples now were on an upraised platform
- **Examples:** The Shiva temple at Bhumara (Madhya Pradesh).



**Figure:** Ladkhan Temple, Aihole

### Stage 3

- Square temple with a low and squat tower (shikhara) above.
- The Panchayatana Style was introduced along with the concept of subsidiary shrines.
- **Examples:** The Dasavatara temple (built in stone at Deogarh, Jhansi district) and the brick temple at Bhitargaon (Kanpur district).
- A high platform at the base and the tower add to the elevation of the composition.
- The second and third types storeyed and Shikara underwent further developments to crystallise into two distinctive styles in the south and the north namely Nagara style and Dravida style respectively.



**Figure:** Dasavatara Temple

### Stage 4

- Rectangular temple with an apsidal back and barrel-vaulted roof above
- **Example:** Ter temple at Sholapur (as shown in below figure).



### Stage 5

- Circular temple with shallow rectangular projections at the four cardinal faces