

## MAURYAN AND POST MAURYAN ART

In the previous lesson, we learnt about sculpture of the Indus Valley civilization. In this lesson, we will learn Mauryan and post-Mauryan art. The Mauryan period is marked by the dramatic development of the arts. Emperor Ashoka, the grandson of the great Chandragupta Maurya, was a generous patron of the arts. The Maurya capital Patliputra emerged as the centre of power and patronage of the Arts, especially architecture and sculpture. Notable examples of the architecture and sculpture of this period are the pillars, *stupas* and cave temples. Most sculptures from the Maurys period are made of sandstone. The human, animal, bird and botanical forms are remarkably expressive and beautiful. In these sculptures anatomy has received detailed attention, and depiction is realistic, showing markedly evident rules of ratio and balance. The sculptures are characterized by their highly polished glossy surfaces.



### OBJECTIVES

After learning the lesson, the learner will be able to:

- describe the development of Mauryan sculpture;
- explain the theme and technique of Mauryan sculpture;
- explain the format, theme and technique of Kushan sculpture;
- explain the format and technique of Andhra sculpture;
- write the origin and evaluation of Post Mauryan Gandhar art;
- differentiate the differences and similarities between Gandhar and Mathura art and Andhra section.

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The Mauryan Mother Goddess figurines in stone and terracotta have well-defined shapes and detailed ornamentation. These technically sophisticated artefacts are the defining sculptures of this period. The most important and impressive sculptures of this period are the pillars of Ashoka with edicts of the great Emperor engraved on them. These pillars bear testimony to the gradual development of the artists' original creativity and technique. The dynamic and very lifelike animal figures carved on the capitals testify to the high level of stone craft. With the decline of the Mauryan dynasty the empire was disintegrated and various other dynasties became powerful in various parts of the country. Sungas, Kanvas and Kushanas ruled north, whereas Satavahans ruled in Maharashtra, Andhra, Telangana and Karnataka. Sculptural activity continued all over India. Sculptures belonging to Buddhism, Jainism and Brahmanical Hindu religions were produced. The most notable sculptures are the Buddhist faith in the early historical period. Kanishka (second century CE/AD), the greatest of the Kushana dynasty rulers, was another patron of sculpture and architecture. Kushan's empire stretched from Oxus in modern day Afghanistan to Varanasi and from Kashmir to the coast of Gujarat and also Malwa. During his time Gandhara art, a creative synthesis of Indian and Greek influences, took root in the Gandhar region (between Pakistan and Afghanistan). Its theme was Buddhism. Sculptural production can be divided into two distinct stylistic groups, one merged in the Gandhar area and the other in the Gangetic valley which was also a continuity of tradition. The Gandhar school produced a number of images of Buddha. Bodhisattvas, narratives of the life of Buddha and the Jatukas. The style of Gandhara art was a combination of Greek and Roman traditions.

In the Gangetic valley important centre of art production was Mathura. The Mathura sculptors of this region left behind a veritable treasure trove of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist sculptures. They picked skills from the sculptors of Sanchi and Bharhut and further refined them. The various *Yakshis*, *Shalabhanjikas*, *Apsaras* and other female figures carved in high relief on the pillars and gateways of both Buddhist and Jains monuments show that they took the special interest in sculpting dynamic, scantily clad, voluptuous, fine-featured female figures in association with flora and fauna. Sculptures of Vishnu, Surya, Kubera, the Nagas, the Yakshas and Kings were also produced in Mathura workshops. Of the Mathura productions, portraits of Kushana kings are of special interest. The sculptural art of this period marked unique stylistic characteristics.

**Ajanta Sculptures:** Amaravati is located near Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. It has a great Buddhist Stupa adorned with sculptures. Its matured phase of activity, mainly belonging to the second century CE is noteworthy for its sculptural development. It shows very different stylistic features in the tradition of Indian sculptures; figures are elongated, have considerable body curves, and have cylindrical volume and crowded composition. The sculpture representing the adoration of the bowl of the Buddha is carved in round medallion relief. Using

different postural angles such as front, back, three-fourth etc. shows the idea of recession/perspective in the picture space. Every figure is aptly carved with considerable attention and care.

**Ajanta Painting:** Ajanta caves have paintings belonging to three phases. The early paintings are found in Ajanta cave no. 9 and 10. The Buddha images on the pillars of cave 10 and 9 belong to mid-third century CE whereas the later phase of Ajanta paintings belong to fifth century CE and are found in many caves such as cave 1,2, 16, 17 etc.

### 5.1 CHANWARDHARINI YAKSHI (YAKSHI WITH THE FLYWHISK)

First, you need to understand the sculptures found in the Mauryan period.

#### Basic Information

The earlier tradition of yaksha (earth spirit) worship was continued by Brahmin, Jain and Buddhist traditions. Worshipped as symbols of prosperity and power in every village, the yakshas were also associated with longevity, immortality and good health. Large statues of these earth spirits were placed in an open area. During the Maurya period, the Yaksha sculptures were carved on all sides, but there is little or no ornamentation except at the front.



Fig. 5.1: Chanwardharini Yakshi



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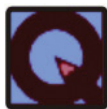
### Mauryan and Post Mauryan Art

Characterized by their stout anatomy, the large Mauryan Yakshi sculptures are in a class of their own. The 'Chanwardharini Yakshi' is undoubtedly one of the best specimen of the Mauryan yaksha sculptures. This highly polished red sandstone sculpture is a masterpiece of the art of stone carving. The voluptuous body conforming to traditional standards of beauty, the ornamentation, the drape of her clothes, the mix of strength and elegance, all point to the painstaking attention to detail by the artisans. Its polish is considered a unique world-wide, it gives a glossy metallic finish to sandstone.

Title	:	<b>Chanwardharini Yakshi (Also known as Didarganj Chauri Bearer or Didarganj Yakshi)</b>
Medium	:	Sandstone
Period	:	Maurya Period (3rd century BCE)
Size	:	162.2 cm.
Found at	:	Didarganj (Patna)
Sculptor	:	Unknown
Collection	:	Patna Museum, Bihar

#### General Description

Considered the most remarkable piece of Mauryan art, this lifesize sculpture stands 162.2 cm tall. Carved out of a single piece of sandstone, the Chanwardharini Yakshi displays strong in its formal body structure with a proportionate body and an expressive face. Her heavy breasts, broad hips, narrow waist and the muscular folds on the lower abdomen are delineated meticulously displaying center over handling of the medium and naturalism. Her hair is neatly arranged in a bun at the nape. Her jewellery includes a headband, heavy ear-rings, a choker and a long necklace, bangles, an exquisite five-strand girdle and thick anklets. Obviously an attendant of a royal personage, she is holding a *Chanwar* (Fly whisk or *Chauri*) in her right hand, and her left arm is missing. The mekhala (skirt) is draped elegantly with folds and pleats. The sheer shawl covering the upper part of the body goes over the left shoulder and flows to her feet. As a matter of technique a craftsman first carved the rough figure with a chisel. Then it was given the final shape with a smaller chisel. The surface was then polished with a stone and a high gloss.



#### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.1

Match the following:

- |                          |                      |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Chanwardharini Yakshi | (i) Folds and pleats |
| 2. Mekhala               | (ii) Head band       |
| 3. Jewellery             | (iii) Stand stone    |

## 5.2 YAKSHI WITH A CAGE

Now, let us learn about the female figure Yakshi with cage.

### Basic Information

There are many female figures found in early art. They are other designated as Yakshi figures. Mathura sculptors of the Kushana period have depicted the Yakshi figures uninhibited sensuousness of the female form very earthy representation. The yakshis are everywhere on the railing pillars of Buddhist stupas, on panels, as independent sculptures and also as part of a strong scene. These sculptures show the yakshis, the titular deities of erotica and fertility, in a happy playful mood. They are mostly depicted standings on railing pillars, standing on the back of a yaksha figure, dancing, and playing musical instruments. Their well-endowed bodies have just cloths and having ornaments. Showing the female form to maximum advantage, Yakshis are often shown in the *Tribhanga* posture with the tilted head, a leg thrust forward and the torso slightly tilted to one side. Carved on pillars, these figures include the curds seller and a woman in distinctly Persian robes holding a lamp. Expressing contemporary mores, a Yakshi at toilette is seen accompanied by a handmaiden holding a casket.



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Fig. 5.2: Yakshi with Cage



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Title	:	<b>Yakshi with Cage</b>
Medium	:	Red sandstone
Period	:	2nd century C. E.
Place of origin	:	Mathura
Collection	:	National Museum, New Delhi

### General Description

The Yakshi are generally described as protecting female deities and are found in the early historic period. These mostly sensuous forms are the most lively sculptures of the Kushan period. Her voluptuous body and heavily ornamented figure and light volume are important aesthetic characteristics of this period. Standing in the *Tribhanga* posture, the sensuous 'Yakshi with Cage' is a remarkable sculpture from the Kushan period. Heavily bejewelled, clad only in a Mekhala (skirt), holding a cage, looking at the parrot perched on her left shoulder, she stands atop the figure of the dwarf figure. There is a suggestive smile on her face. Stone is dressed first, and then the figure is drawn on stone. The area outside the outline is then chiselled away, leaving the figure in bold relief. The figure is then carved in detail with a fine chisel. Finally, the figure is polished with stone. The early centuries of the Christian era produced a number of images in the Gangetic and Gandhara areas as well as in central and southern India.



### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.2

#### Fill in the blanks:

1. Medium used for the 'Yakshi with Cage' sculpture is .....
2. The area outside the outline is then ..... away, leaving the ..... in the bold relief.

### 5.3 STANDING BUDDHA

Now, you will learn about the Gandharva style.

#### Basic Information

Before the Gandhar art came into existence, the Jataka tales about the past stories of the Buddha were engraved on stone, and Buddha was never depicted in the human form. Instead, motifs like the elephant, the bull, the horse, the stupa, and the Chhatra (umbrella) symbolized his presence. But, by the Kushan period, the Buddha in human form was a favourite theme of sculptors. Both the Gandhara and Mathura schools of Buddhist art produced Buddha statues in large numbers. The figures depicted in the two styles were very different from each other. The Buddha figures produced on the available pictorial conventions of Yaksha images. The



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Gandhar Buddha, on the other hand, had an element of the Greco-Roman pictorial conventions. The Prathian and Acamenian traditions are mixed with the local tradition, which is known as Gandhar traditions. Image of Budha and Budhisattms are produced in Gandhara and Gangetic areas. The Avalokiteswara holding a lotus, Manjushree holding a book, and Maitreya holding a pitcher are so bejewelled that they look like royal personages. Some Buddha figures also sport facial hair. The heavy ornamentation of the Gandhar Bodhisatvas makes them look more like royal figures and less like ascetics. To convey their spiritual elevation, they have been shown with halos around their heads. The halo is a significant contribution to the Gandhara school. The sculptures are distinguishable by fine carving, heavy ornamentation, symbols and fine detailing of creases in robes.



**Fig. 5.3: Standing Buddha**

Ajanta caves have paintings belonging to three phases. The early paintings are found in Ajanta caves no. 9 and 10. The Buddha images on the pillars of caves 10 and 9 belong to mid-third century CE whereas the later phase of Ajanta paintings belong to fifth century CE and are found in many caves such as cave 1,2, 16, 17 etc.

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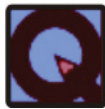


Notes

Title	:	<b>Standing Buddha</b>
Medium	:	Gray sandstone
Period	:	Gandhar (2nd Century)
Size	:	250 cm.
Collection	:	Miho Museum, Japan

### General Description

This standing figure of Buddha has a detailed halo, Greek style curly hair with a topknot. He is depicted wearing a robe covering from the neck to the feet, of special note is the realistic depiction of the physicality and the sharp folds of the robe. The long ears, the nimbus behind his head, and the benevolence in the facial expression imbue it with spiritual connotations. The missing right hand was most probably raised in the *abhayamudra*. The left arm is slightly bent and the hand holds the garment. The fold of the garment is so prominent that it bears considerable heaviness. Carrying the sculpture is done with a lot of precision. The image is standing on the pedestal. Stone is properly dressed to carve on the figure and then gradually chiselled to make the image.

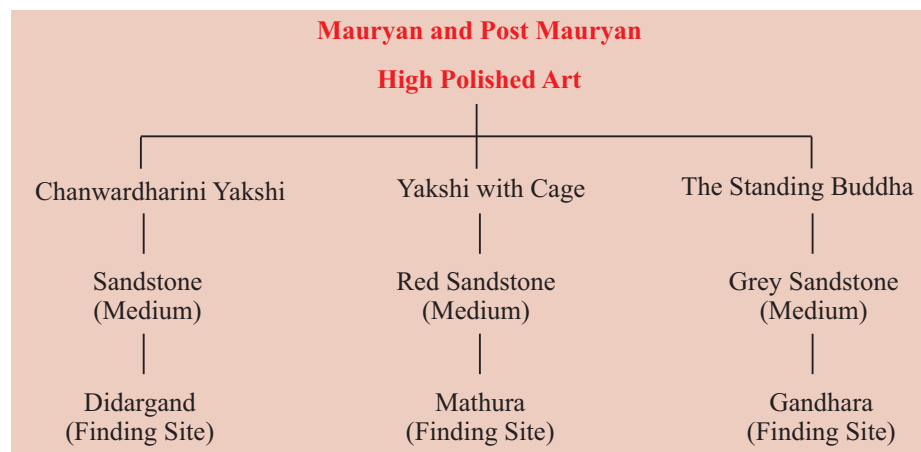


### INTEXT QUESTIONS 5.3

1. Which period does the Standing Buddha belong?
2. How was Buddha represented before he came to be depicted in human form?



### WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT





LEARNING OUTCOMES

The learner can

- apply the colour on their own artifacts, after observing the Mauryan sculptures.
- polish with a stone and then finally polish for high gloss on their art objects.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Describe the theme of Mauryan and post-Mauryan sculpture.
2. How did the theme of Mauryan art differ from Kushan and Gandhara art?
3. How did Gandhara sculpture differ from Kushana sculpture?
4. Describe the Chanwardharini Yakshi.
5. In Gandhara art the style was Greco-Roman with the Indian tradition, Elaborate.
6. Describe in brief the 'Yakshi with Cage' sculpture made.
7. Where is the 'Yakshi with Cage' collected?
8. Describe the Standing Buddha from the aesthetic point of view.
9. Elaborate on the characteristics of Gandhara art.
10. Describe the two hands of the Standing Buddha.



ANSWERS TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

5.1

1. Chanwardharini      Sandstone
2. Mekhla              Fold and Pleats
3. Jewellery            Head band

5.2

1. Red Sandstone.
2. Chisselled, figure

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### 5.3

1. The standing Buddha was made in the Gandhara region in the 2nd Century.
2. Earlier Buddha was never depicted in the human form, he was represented by motifs like the elephant, the bull, the horse, the *stupa* and the *chatra* (umbrella).

### GLOSSARY

Stupa	Buddhist memorial
Stout	Strong
Voluptuous	Find of pleasure of life
Mekhala	Skirt