

UPSC Civil Services Examination

UPSC Notes [GS-I]

Topic: Post-Mauryan Trends in Indian Art and Architecture - Part II [NCERT Notes]

Cave Tradition in Western India

- Caves dating from the 2nd century BC have been excavated.
- Three architectural types:
 - Apsidal vault-roof chaitya halls – Ajanta, Bhaja, Pitalkhora
 - Apsidal vault-roof pillarless halls – Thana-Nadsur
 - Flat-roofed quadrangular hall with a circular chamber at the back – Kondivite in Mumbai
- The front of the chaitya hall has an imposing semi-circular chaitya arch with an open front having a wooden façade.
- The caves at Kondivite have no chaitya arch.
- All the chaitya caves have a stupa at the rear.
- An example of the apsidal vault-roof kind: Ajanta Cave No. 9. This chaitya has a rectangular hall with a stone-screen wall as façade. Similar kinds are found at Nashik, Bedsa, Kanheri and Karla.
- After the first century BC, many caves are of the first architectural type.
- Junnar has the highest number of cave excavations – more than 200.
- Kanheri in Mumbai has 108 excavated caves.
- Most important sites: Ajanta, Pitalkhora, Ellora, Nashik, Karla, Bhaja, Junnar and Kanheri.
- Earlier it was believed that these caves belonged to the orthodox Theravada sect of Buddhism. But the discovery of the Konkan Maurya inscription which mentions Saka era 322 (corresponding to 400 AD) proves that cave activity in western Deccan was a continuing process.
- Some of these sites have been converted into modern Hindu shrines and are used to this day by the local people.
- Rock-cut caves are found not only in Maharashtra but also in:
 - Karnataka – mainly in Badami and Aihole patronised by the Chalukyas.
 - Andhra Pradesh – Vijayawada area.
 - Tamil Nadu – Mahabalipuram patronised by Pallavas.
- Post 6th century art depended more on political patronage as opposed to the collective public patronage of the earlier periods.

Karla Caves

- Located at Karla, Lonavala in Maharashtra.
- Biggest rock-cut chaitya hall was excavated in Karla.
- This cave has an open courtyard with 2 pillars, a stone-screen wall to protect from rain, a veranda, a stone-screen wall as façade, an apsidal vault-roof chaitya hall with pillars and a stupa at the rear.
- Chaitya hall is carved with human and animal figures.

Viharas

- Viharas have been excavated at all cave sites.
- Vihara plan: a veranda, a hall and cells around the walls of the hall.
- Important viharas – Ajanta cave No.12; Nashik Cave Nos. 3, 10 and 17; Bedsa cave No.11.
- Early vihara caves are carved with interior decorative motifs like chaitya arches and vedica designs over the cell doors.
- The vihara caves at Nashik have front pillars carved with ghata-base and ghata-capital with human figures.
- A popular such cave was found at Junnar and was popularly called Ganeshlini since an image of Ganesha belonging to a later era was installed in it. It became a chaitya-vihara when a stupa was added to the back of this vihara.

Ajanta

- Most famous cave site. Located in Aurangabad district, Maharashtra.
- There are 29 caves in Ajanta.
- 4 chaitya caves:
 - Cave nos. 10 and 9 belonging to 1st and 2nd centuries BC.
 - Cave nos. 19 and 26 belonging to the 5th century AD.
- There are large chaitya-viharas also.
- Decorated with sculptures and paintings.
- The only remaining example of 1st century BC and 5th century AD paintings.
- Cave nos. 19 and 26:
 - Elaborately carved.
 - Façade decorated with the images of Buddha and Boddhisattva.
 - Apsidal vault-roof variety. Cave no. 26 – very big, interior hall carved with Buddha images; biggest image being Mahaparinibbana image.
- Ajanta shrine images are big in size.

- Chief patrons at Ajanta:
 - Varahadeva, a minister of the Vakataka king Harishena – cave no. 16
 - Upendragupta, local king and a feudatory of the Vakataka king – cave nos. 17 – 20.
 - Buddhabhadra – cave no. 26
 - Mathuradasa – cave no. 4
- Paintings indicate many typological variations. Outward projections are seen from the 5th century onwards. Lines are well-defined and rhythmic. The figures are heavy much like the sculptures found in this region. The colours are limited.
- The paintings show various skin colours like brown, yellowish brown, greenish, yellow ochre, etc. indicating a multi-coloured populace.
- The themes of the paintings are events from the Buddha's life, Jatakas and Avadanas.
- Padmapani and Vajrapani images are very common in the Ajanta caves. Some paintings cover the entire wall of the caves. Example: Simhala Avadana, Vidharpundita Jataka and Mahajanaka Jataka.
- In many paintings, events are grouped geographically. Famous example of painting from cave no.1 – Padmapani Bodhisattva.

Ellora

- Important cave site in Aurangabad. Located 100 km from Ajanta.
- It has 32 Buddhist, Jain and Brahmanical caves.
- It is a unique historical site in India as it has monasteries associated with the three religions from the 5th to the 11th century AD.
- Buddhist caves:
 - 12 in number.
 - Images belong to Vajrayana Buddhism like Tara, Akshobhya, Mahamayuri, Avalokiteshvara, Maitreya, etc.
 - Are big in size and are of single, double and triple storeys.
 - Triple storeyed cave is found only at Ellora.
 - Have massive pillars.
 - All caves were plastered and painted but nothing is visible today.
 - The sculptures are monumental.
 - The shrine Buddha images are big generally guarded by the images of Padmapani and Vajrapani.
- Jain caves:
 - Are more ornate than the Buddhist caves.
 - The decorative forms are heavily protruded.
 - Belong to 9th century AD and onwards.

- Brahmanical caves:
 - Numbered 13 – 28.
 - Cave no. 14 is the only double storey cave here.
 - Have images of Shiva and Vishnu and their different forms.
 - Prominent Shaivite themes: Andhakasurvadha, Ravana shaking Mt. Kailas and Kalyanasundara.
 - Prominent Vaishnavite theme: avatars of Vishnu.
- Ellora caves have been carved by various artisan guilds that came from Vidarbha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. Most diverse site in India.
- Cave no. 16 – also called Kailashleni. Here, a rock-cut temple is carved out of a single rock.

Elephanta Caves

- Located in Elephanta Island in Mumbai Harbour.
- Originally a Buddhist site, later dominated by Shaivism.
- Contemporary with Ellora caves.
- Sculptures are slender in body images with stark light and dark effects.

Cave Tradition in Eastern India

- Mainly located in the coastal regions of Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.
- Main sites in AP – Guntapalle in Elluru.
- Unique because structural stupas, viharas and caves are excavated in one place.
- Guntapalle Chaitya Cave – circular hall with a stupa and a chaitya arch at the entrance.
- Most of them date back to the 2nd century BC.
- Most of the caves are vihara type.
- The biggest rock-cut stupas in India are found at Anakapalli near Vishakhapatnam. Carved during the 4th – 5th centuries AD.
- Earliest examples in Odisha – Udaigiri-Khandagiri caves near Bhubaneswar.
- Scattered caves with inscriptions of Kharavela kings. As per the inscriptions, the caves were intended for Jaina monks.