



Rock Art (Part-2)

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Rock Art (Part-I)

Rock-Cut Architecture

- **About:**

- The rock-cut architecture is a type of Rock Art in which a structure is created by carving it out of solid natural rock.
- Cave temples and monasteries are found in many parts of India, but the **largest and most famous artificial caves** were excavated from **Western Deccan region**.

It was constructed during the regime of the **Satavahana rulers** and their successors.

- **Timeline:**

This architecture had three definite phases;

- The earliest dating from the 2nd century BC to 2nd century AD
- The second from the 5th to 7th century
- The last from the 7th to 10th century

- **Significance:**

- Rock-cut architecture occupies a very important place in the history of Indian Architecture as they present the most spectacular piece of ancient Indian art specimen.
- Most of the rock-cut structures were closely associated with various **religions and religious activities**.
- Numerous caves were excavated by the Buddhist monks for **prayer and residence purposes**.
- The rock-cut architecture differs from traditional buildings in many ways.

It is **more similar to sculpture** than architecture, as structures were produced by cutting out solid rocks.

- The architectures are classified into **Rock-Cut Caves** and **Rock-Cut Temple Architecture**.

Rock-Cut Caves

- **Mauryan period:** The earliest rock-cut caves in India are attributed to the Mauryan period, mainly to **Ashoka (273-232 BC)** and his grandson Dasharath.
 - Caves in this period were generally used as **viharas**, i.e. living quarters, by the Jain and Buddhist monks.
 - Caves were earlier used by the Ajivika sect and later by the Buddhists as monasteries.
 - **Barabar caves and Nagarjuni caves** in Bihar were formed during the time of Dasharath, grandson of Ashoka.
- **Post-Mauryan Period:** The construction of rock caves continued as in the Mauryan period. However, this period saw the development of Viharas and Chaitya halls.
 - The **Chaitya halls** were mainly quadrangular chambers with flat roofs and used as prayer halls.
 - Inside Chaityas and Viharas, windows and balconies and gates were carved as huge arch shaped openings.
 - The caves also had open courtyards and stone screen walls to shield from rain and were decorated with human and animal figures.
 - **Examples: Karle Chaitya hall, Ajanta caves** (29 caves (25 Vihars + 4 Chaitya)), etc.

- **Gupta Period:** The emergence of the Gupta Empire in the 4th century A.D. is often hailed as the “**Golden period of Indian Architecture**”.
 - During the Gupta period, architectural development of the caves remained constant.
 - However, the use of **mural paintings on the walls** of the caves became an added feature.
 - **Important Caves of the Gupta Period:**
 - Udayagiri Caves:** At Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh, **20 rock-cut chambers** were excavated during the Gupta period, two of which bear inscriptions from the reign of **Chandra Gupta II**.
 - These caves are vital documents since they constitute the earliest intact body of Hindu art in India.
 - One of the most important Udayagiri caves is Cave 5, the **Varaha Cave**.
 - Its main feature is a colossal rock-cut relief of the boar-incarnation of God Vishnu rescuing the Earth Goddess from chaos in the presence of adoring gods and saints.
 - **Ajanta Caves:** Ajanta is a series of **rock-cut caves in the Sahyadri ranges** on **Waghora river** near Aurangabad in Maharashtra.
 - These caves were **carved out in 4th century AD out of volcanic rocks**.
 - It consists of a set of 29 caves, carved in a horse-shoe shape.
 - 25 of them were used as Viharas or residential caves while 4 were used as Chaitya or prayer halls.
 - **Ellora Caves:** Ellora caves are another important site of cave architecture.
 - It's located nearly 100 Kms away from Ajanta caves.
 - It is a group of **34 caves – 17 Brahmanical, 12 Buddhist and 5 Jain**.
 - These caves were developed during the period between 5th and 11th centuries A.D. (**newer as compared to the Ajanta caves**).
 - **Bagh Caves:** Located on the bank of the Bagh river in Madhya Pradesh, Bagh Caves is a group of **9 Buddhist caves** developed around the 6th Century A.D.
 - It is architecturally **very similar to the Ajanta caves** in terms of their design, execution and decoration.
 - These are remarkable and interesting rock-cut shrines and monasteries.
 - In modern times these caves were first discovered in **1818**.

Other Important Rock Cut Caves:

- **Udayagiri and Khandagiri Caves, Odisha:** They were made under the **Kalinga King Kharavela** in 1st-2nd century BC near modern-day Bhubaneswar.
 - The cave complex has both man-made and natural caves possibly carved out for residence of Jain monks.
 - There are 18 caves in Udayagiri and 15 in Khandagiri.
 - Udayagiri caves are famous for the **Hathigumpha inscription** which is carved out in Brahmi script.
- **Sittanavasal Caves (Arivar Koil):**

Located 16 km northwest of Pudukkottai town in Tamil Nadu, these famous rock-cut caves are known for the **paintings in the Jain temples.**
- **Jogimara Cave:**
 - It is an **artificially carved out cave** located in Surguja district of Chhattisgarh.
 - It is dated back around 1000-300 BC and has few **paintings and inscriptions** of a love story in **Brahmi script.**
 - The cave is said to be an attachment to amphitheatre and paintings were made to decorate the room.
- **Nasik Caves:**
 - It is a group of **24 Buddhist caves (Hinayana Period)**, also known as “**Pandav Leni**”, developed during the 1st century A.D.
 - These caves belong to the **Hinayana period.** However, later, the influence of the Mahayana period can also be found in these caves.
 - The idols of Buddha were also carved inside these caves representing influence of Mahayana Buddhism.
 - The site also depicts an **excellent system of water management** indicated through the presence of **water tanks carved out of solid rocks.**

Rock-Cut Temple Architecture

- **About:**

A monolithic rock-cut **temple** is chiselled out of a single colossal rock in the shape of masonry or wooden temples including embellishment on walls and other areas showcasing fine work of art and engineering.
- The architects of the **Pallava Dynasty** initiated rock carving to create monolithic structures that resemble temples.
- **Rock-Cut Temple Architecture in South India:**

Temple architecture in South India began under the **Pallava ruler Mahendravarman.**

- The temples developed during the Pallava dynasty reflected the stylistic taste of the individual rulers and can be classified into four stages chronologically.
 - **Mahendra group:** This was the first stage of Pallava temple architecture.
 - The temples built under Mahendravarman were basically **rock-cut temples**.
 - Under him, the temples were known as mandapas, unlike the Nagara style in which the mandapas meant only the assembly hall.
 - **Narasimha group:** Second stage of the development of temple architecture in South India.
 - The **rock-cut temples were decorated by intricate sculptures**.
 - The mandapas were now divided into separate rathas.
 - The biggest one was called the Dharmaraja ratha while the smallest one was called the Draupadi ratha.
 - **Rajsimha group and Nandivarman group:** Third and fourth stage of temple development.
 - Development of real structural temples was started which **replaced the rock-cut temples**.

- **Important Rock-Cut Temples:**

- **Kailash Temple:** It is a rock-cut temple complex, dedicated to Lord Shiva in the Ellora Caves (16).
 - It was developed under the patronage of **Rashtrakuta king Krishna I (8th century A.D.)** and was carved out of a monolith, and even has a courtyard.
 - There is also a **sculpture on the wall of Kailash temple** depicting Ravana shaking Mount Kailash. It is considered one of the masterpieces of Indian sculpture.
 - It is counted among the **largest rock-cut monastery-temple caves** complexes of the world and marked as a **UNESCO World Heritage Site.**
 - The temple also showcases fine architectural works including relief panels depicting the two main Hindu Epics namely the **Ramayana and the Mahabharata.**
 - Pallava and Chalukya styles of architecture are noticed in this cave temple which is decorated with **carved sculptures** including that of gods and goddesses from the Hindu Puranas.
- **Architecture at Mahabalipuram:** The ancient **port city** of **Mamallapuram** under **Pallava dynasty** in Tamil Nadu, flourished with a number of marvelous architecture.

These seventh century Pallava sites have been declared as **UNESCO-World Heritage Sites** in 1984 by the name “Group of **Monuments at Mahabalipuram**”. They include:

- **Pancha Ratha:** Also known as **Pandava Rathas**, they are the **earliest rock cut temples** in India, comprising of Dharmaraja Ratha, Bhima Ratha, Arjuna Ratha, Nakula and Sahadeva Ratha, and Draupadi Ratha, dated around 7th century AD.

Dharmaraja Ratha is the largest structure among the five.

- **Rock-cut caves:** which include Varaha Cave Temple, Krishna Cave Temple, Panchapandava Cave Temple, and the Mahishasuramardini Mandapa (Bas-relief of Goddess Durga killing Mahishasura).
- **Open Air Rock Reliefs:** which include **Descent of the Ganges** which is also known as **Arjuna’s Penance or Bhagiratha’s Penance** carved on two huge boulders.

It narrates the story of descent of River Ganga on earth from heaven by the efforts of Bhagiratha.

- **Shore Temple complex:** It includes two small and one large temple enclosed within a two tier compound wall studded with images of **Nandi**, the vahana of Shiva.

The temple is predominantly dedicated to Lord Shiva with a sculpture of **Anantashayana Vishnu** in one of the three temples within the complex.

- **Badami Cave Temples:** Badami (Karnataka) was the capital of Chalukyas.
 - It has four cave temples based on **Hinduism (3)** and **Jainism (1)**.
 - This is a **rock-cut architecture** which dates back to the 6th century AD.
 - They are the earliest known temples in the Deccan region.
 - **Cave 1:** An important sculpture carved inside the cave temple is of Lord Shiva as **Nataraja**. There also lies a relief of Harihara (half Vishnu and half Shiva).
 - **Cave 2:** Dedicated primarily to Vishnu, the largest relief is of Lord Vishnu as **Trivikrama**. Other forms such as **Vamana avatar** (dwarf avatar) and **Varaha** (Boar) **avatar** can also be found.
 - **Cave 3:** It is the largest cave in the complex and has intricately carved reliefs of Trivikrama, **Anantasayana**, Vasudeva, Varaha, Harihara and **Narasimha**.
 - **Cave 4:** It is a Jain cave with intricate structures of Bahubali, Parshvanatha and Mahavira with a symbolic display of the other Tirthankaras.

Note:

- The rulers of the **Vijayanagara Empire** (1335-1565 AD) were great patrons of art and architecture. The features of the Vijayanagara temples were:
 - Highly decorated temple walls with carvings and geometrical patterns.
 - Gopurams built on all the sides (previously built only on the front side).
 - **Monolithic rock pillars**
- Example: Vittalaswami temple, Virupaksha temple in Hampi.
Rock-cut idol of Narasimha on Shesha (snake) near Hampi is a marvel in itself.