

Q Brief out the salient features of the religious developments in the Post-Mauryan period. How was contemporary art influenced by it?

The coming of foreign rulers in the post-Mauryan period affected the social milieu & religious practices of that time.

This period witnessed changes in all the important religions, be it early Brahmanism or Buddhism & Jainism. Major religious developments of this period were -

i) formative phase of Hindu pantheons - Some of the deities who became popular during this period were known from Vedic literature but during these centuries, they emerged as foci of devotion, as powerful supreme deities, whose images were installed & worshipped in temples & homes. There are various textual references which indicated this rise of different images of various Brahmanical gods, such as Baudhayana Grihya-sutra mentions about worship of images of deities.

ii) Several cults lost their importance - Cults of Yakshas & Yakshis, Nagas & Nagis were, no doubt, continued to exist during this period but they lost the importance which they used to hold earlier. Stone & terracotta sculptures from sites such as Mathura clearly indicate that the popular cults of Yakshas & Nagas were gradually being pushed to the



margins by the gods & goddesses of the Brahmanical tradition. The story of Krishna subduing Kaliya naga can be interpreted as an allegorical reference to the ultimate victory of Vishnuism over the once popular naga cult.

iii) Rise of new Brahmanical sectarian cults - The most influential of the newly emerging cults were associated with the worship of the gods Shiva, Vishnu & the goddess Durga. So, this period saw the rise of Shaivism, Vaishnavism and of the Shakti cult. Brahmanical cults diversified during this period to incorporate various new elements brought by the foreign rulers, into its fold.

iv) Emergence of monolatry - Polytheism simply refers to a belief in many gods but monolatry means the belief in a supreme god without denying the existence of other gods. This is also evident from the fact that shrines dedicated to one deity often had sculptural representations of other deities as well. Thus, this period saw the emergence of monolatry.

v) Continuing importance of Vedic rituals - During 200 BC to 300 CE there are various evidences of continuing vedic rituals. Rulers like Pushyamitra Shunga & certain Satvahana & Skhuvaku kings claimed to have performed Vedic sacrifices. Sacrificial posts (Gupas) are depicted on some coins.

vi) Emergence of Mahayana Buddhism - This period is associated with the rise of Mahayana Buddhism. The fourth Buddhist Council



was held during the time of Kanishka which led to the emergence of Mahayana. The highest goal in older Buddhism was the attainment of nirvana & becoming an arhat but Mahayana emphasised on attaining Buddhahood & refraining from taking the final step into nirvana, rather choosing to help others achieve this goal.

vii) Changes in Jainism - It is difficult to date the schism within Jainism. Digambara tradition explains the schism by referring to a southward migration of Jaina monks in the wake of an impending famine. The northern monks, led by Sthulabhadra, had codified the canon. They had also started wearing clothes which the southerners thought unacceptable. During this period temple cult also developed in Jainism. Plenty of Jaina images belonging to 200 B.C are found from various sites.

These religious developments got manifested in the art of the post-Mauryan period. Many architectural evidences related to the post-Mauryan art are found, some of which are -

i) Early Hindu temples - The evidence of Hindu temples of this period consists mostly of ground plans revealed by archaeological excavations as the superstructures have not survived. For instance the remains of what has been a Vishnu temple in the vicinity of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C Heliodorus pillar in Vidisha. Remains of apsidal temple in Atranjikhera are also found. With the



point of view of art, few plaques & motifs are found in these temple which tell us about the iconography of that period. For example, a Guaja-Latchmi plaque was found from the Atranjikkera temple showing two elephants sprinkling water over the head of the goddess from their upraised trunks.

ii) Buddhist structures - The period 200 BC-300 CE saw an expansion in the number of various Buddhist structures, be it Chaityas or stupas or dwellings for monks. Many Buddhist stupa-monastery sites evolved gradually revealing many sculptural & architectural styles.

i) Stupas of Central India - Sanchi & Baahut

In central India, the surface of a stupa was not embellished with sculptures. Sculptural decoration was reserved for the railings & gateways. The shape of the gateways suggests that they were stone renditions of wooden prototypes. Various scenes from the Buddha's life were carved on the gateways. Sculptural representation of Jataka stories are also found.

ii) Stupas of Andhra Pradesh - Amravati, Nagarjunakonda

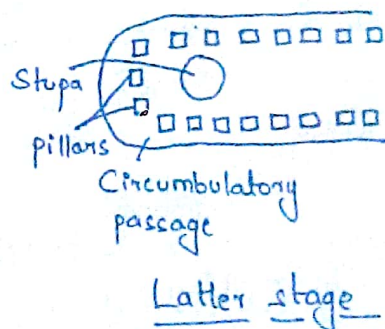
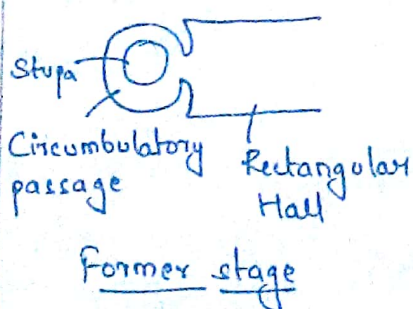
Some of the stupas of the Andhra region had a solid brick or stone construction. The body of others consisted of a spoked-wheel plan. This plan related to a key Buddhist feature - the chakra. Another notable feature was that there were five free standing pillars known as ayaka pillars on a raised platform at the four cardinal points. They represented five important events



in the life of Buddha - his birth, renunciation, enlightenment, first sermon & death.

iii) Stupa-monasteries of the North west - These have both Indian & Hellenistic features. Unlike the stupas of Central India, these had a tower-like appearance with sculptural decoration on the base & dome. These decorations included pilasters, niches & different kinds of arches. The capitals of the pilasters framing the niches seem to have been inspired from Corinthian capitals while the chaitya arches were an Indian feature.

iv) Buddhist Caves in the Western Ghats - These can be dated between c. 100 B.C & 200 CE. In these caves a rectangular hall lead into a round stupa chamber with a narrow circumambulatory passage. But in the next stage two rows of pillars were introduced, following the line of the walls & extending into the apse. Eg Caves at Nashik, Kanheri, Karle etc.



The early viharas in the Western Ghats were simple & consisted of cells arranged around a central hall with an open verandah in front. Sometimes these cells have a rock-cut bed & rock-cut pillow. The richly carved reliefs in the verandah & entrance of Vihara 19 at Bhaja are among the earliest of these.



v) Jain caves at Udaygiri & Khandagiri - The Kattigumpha inscription connects these caves to Chedi dynasty of Kalinga & dates them to 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. With a few exceptions, they are not high enough to permit a man to stand up. They are also very narrow so that person lying down would not have been able to stretch out fully. The interior of the cells was stark & plain, but the outer facade & brackets sometimes had carvings.

vi) Three schools of sculptures developed during this period.

<u>Gandhara</u>	<u>Mathura</u>	<u>Amravati</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heavy influence of Greek &amp; Roman styles and thus also known as Indo-Greek or Greco-Roman style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed indigenous style</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed indigenous style.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Material used</li> <li><u>Early period</u> - Bluish grey sandstone</li> <li><u>Later period</u> - Mud &amp; stucco</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spotted Red Sandstone was used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• White marbles were used</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sculptures were related to Buddhism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They were related to Buddhism, Jainism &amp; Brahmanism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sculptures related to Buddhism.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Patronage given by</u></li> <li>↳ Kushanas</li> </ul>	<p>Kushanas</p>	<p>Satvahanas</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Features</u> - <del>A</del> Curly hair like Greek Gods, more serene look with a bare halo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muscular body with tight garments. face &amp; head shaven. Profusely carved halo</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less emphasis on individual features. Depiction of Jatas</li> </ul>

Therefore in this way the contemporary art during the post-Mauryan period was influenced by the changes taking place in religious sphere.