

Class 11 Fine Arts

NCERT Solutions

Step-by-step solutions for the 2026-27 NCERT edition

Chapter 4: Post-Mauryan Trends in Indian Art and Architecture

This chapter studies post-Mauryan art through Bharhut, Sanchi, Mathura, Gandhara, Amaravati, Ajanta, Ellora and regional cave traditions. Students learn how [torana](#), [pradakshinapatha](#), [Mathura school](#), [Sarnath style](#), [Ajanta murals](#) and [Kailash temple](#) shaped Indian art and architecture. These solutions help students write clear answers using monuments, regions, stylistic features and Buddhist narrative evidence.

Also see for this chapter: [NCERT Book PDF](#)

Exercise

Q 4.1 Describe the physical and aesthetic features of Sanchi Stupa-I.

SOLUTION

Concept used. A stupa answer should combine structure, movement, sculptural decoration and symbolic meaning. Sanchi Stupa-I is important because it shows a developed Buddhist monument with stone covering, pradakshinapatha, vedika, toranas and narrative sculpture.

Use parts plus style

Do not list only parts. Add how the carvings look and what they communicate.

Step 1. Sanchi Stupa-I is one of the finest examples of early stupa architecture.

Step 2. It began as a smaller brick structure and was later enlarged and covered with stone.

Step 3. The stupa has a domical anda, a medhi, a pradakshinapatha and a surrounding vedika.

- Step 4.** It also has an upper pradakshinapatha, which is a special feature of this site.
- Step 5.** Four toranas stand in the four directions and are richly decorated with sculptural panels.
- Step 6.** The carvings show events from the life of the Buddha and Jataka stories.
- Step 7.** The Buddha is represented through symbols such as the empty throne, feet, chhatra and stupa.
- Step 8.** The figures are small but naturalistic, with depth, movement and better body treatment than earlier stiff reliefs.
- Step 9.** Guardian figures and shalbhanjika sculptures show excellent handling of volume.

Final Answer: Sanchi Stupa-I combines a domical stupa form, circumambulatory paths, vedika, four toranas and symbolic Buddhist narrative carvings with naturalistic figure treatment.

Architecture and sculpture reading.

Describe the monument as a worship structure and as a carved visual text.

Step 1. Physically, Sanchi Stupa-I is organised around the anda and the path of circumambulation.

Step 2. The stone vedika defines the sacred boundary and guides the devotee's movement around the monument.

Step 3. The four toranas turn the stupa into a richly narrated structure rather than a plain mound.

Step 4. Aesthetically, the panels show greater mastery than earlier low relief carving.

Step 5. The bodies show depth and dimension, and the rigidity of early relief is reduced.

Step 6. The shalbhanjika figures and guardian images show rounded volume and confident carving.

Step 7. The symbolic representation of the Buddha also shows how early Buddhist art could suggest sacred

presence without a human Buddha image.

Sanchi Stupa-I is significant for its developed stupa plan, double circumambulatory movement, four sculpted gateways and refined symbolic narrative style.

Final Answer: Sanchi Stupa-I is significant for its developed stupa plan, double circumambulatory movement, four sculpted gateways and refined symbolic narrative style.

Q 4.2 Analyse the stylistic trends of the sculptures in North India during the fifth and sixth centuries.

SOLUTION

Concept used. A stylistic trend answer should compare centres and visual features. In this chapter, North Indian sculpture develops through Mathura, Sarnath and related centres, with changes in body volume, drapery, halo treatment and surface refinement.

Name the centres

Use Mathura and Sarnath as the core comparison, then mention Kosambi and museums as study references.

- Step 1.** By the fifth and sixth centuries, North Indian sculpture had moved away from the heavy massiveness of earlier Mathura images.
- Step 2.** The body became more controlled, refined and spiritually calm.
- Step 3.** At Sarnath, Buddha images often have plain transparent drapery covering both shoulders.
- Step 4.** The halo around the head in many Sarnath images has little ornamentation.
- Step 5.** At Mathura, the Buddha images continue to show drapery folds and more decorated halos.
- Step 6.** The fleshiness and heavy volume of earlier Mathura sculpture are reduced in the later phase.
- Step 7.** The drapery becomes integrated into the sculptural mass and the surface appears smoother.

Step 8. The overall trend is towards slenderness, spiritual poise, transparent robes and reduced surface heaviness.

Final Answer: North Indian sculpture in the fifth and sixth centuries moved towards refined bodies, transparent drapery, calmer expression and reduced heaviness, with Sarnath and Mathura showing different drapery and halo styles.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Rohit Banerjee, M.A Visual Arts, Banaras Hindu University*

Style-comparison method. Read the sculpture through body mass, robe, halo and facial treatment.

Step 1. The chapter first traces strong art production at Mathura and Gandhara, then notes later centres such as Sarnath and Kosambi.

Step 2. In the later North Indian phase, the sculptural body is no longer as massive or fleshy as earlier Mathura examples.

- Step 3.** Sarnath images show a gentle, simplified surface. The transparent robe is plain and covers both shoulders.
- Step 4.** Their halos are restrained, which strengthens the calm spiritual mood.
- Step 5.** Mathura remains an important production centre, but its Buddha images keep clearer robe folds and more decorated halos.
- Step 6.** This comparison shows that the fifth and sixth centuries did not have one single look. They shared refinement, but local styles remained visible.

The main trend was refinement: less heavy volume, more controlled modelling, transparent drapery and local differences between Sarnath and Mathura.

Final Answer: The main trend was refinement: less heavy volume, more controlled modelling, transparent drapery and local differences between Sarnath and Mathura.

Q 4.3

How did cave architecture develop in different parts of India, from cave shelters to the monolithic temple at Ellora?

SOLUTION

Concept used. Cave architecture developed from simple shelters and early Buddhist excavations into elaborate chaitya halls, viharas, painted caves and later monumental rock-cut temples. The chapter follows western India, Ajanta, Ellora, Elephanta, the Deccan, eastern India and Odisha.

♥ Show the sequence

A strong answer moves region by region and shows increasing scale, planning and religious variety.

- Step 1.** Early Buddhist caves in western India from the second century BCE used chaitya halls and viharas.
- Step 2.** Major architectural types included apsidal vault-roof chaitya halls, pillarless apsidal halls and flat-roofed quadrangular halls.
- Step 3.** Sites such as Bhaja, Pitalkhora, Ajanta, Bedsa, Nashik, Karla and Kanheri show the growth of these forms.

- Step 4.** Karla has a large rock-cut chaitya hall with courtyard, veranda, facade, pillars and a stupa at the back.
- Step 5.** Viharas developed with veranda, hall and cells around the walls, and later some became chaitya-viharas.
- Step 6.** Ajanta developed into a major Buddhist cave complex with chaitya caves, vihara-chaitya caves, sculptures and paintings.
- Step 7.** Ellora brought Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain caves together, showing stylistic variety and large multi-storeyed excavations.
- Step 8.** The climax is Cave No. 16 at Ellora, the Kailash temple, carved out of a single rock.
- Step 9.** Other regions, including Elephanta, Badami, Aiholi, Mahabalipuram, Guntapalle and Udaigiri-Khandagiri, show regional forms of the rock-cut tradition.

Final Answer: Cave architecture developed from early Buddhist chaitya halls and viharas into complex regional cave complexes, painted Ajanta caves, multi-faith Ellora caves and the monolithic Kailash temple.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Meera Iyer, M.F.A Painting, MS University Baroda*

Development timeline. The key is not one cave but the widening of plan, scale, decoration and religious use.

Step 1. The earliest stage in the chapter is linked with Buddhist use, especially chaitya halls for worship and viharas for monastic residence.

Step 2. Western India shows plan experiments: apsidal halls, vaulted roofs, flat-roofed halls and circular chambers.

Step 3. Karla shows maturity in chaitya planning because the hall, pillars, facade and back stupa are organised into a large ceremonial space.

Step 4. Ajanta expands the tradition by combining architecture, sculpture and

mural painting.

Step 5. Ellora changes the scale further. It includes Buddhist, Brahmanical and Jain caves at one site, so religious and stylistic variety increases.

Step 6. The Kailash temple at Ellora is the major turning point because it is not merely a hollowed cave. It is a monolithic temple carved from one rock.

Step 7. Eastern and southern sites prove that the cave tradition was not limited to Maharashtra. It spread through Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

The development runs from functional monastic caves to elaborate carved religious complexes, ending in the single-rock Kailash temple at Ellora.

Final Answer: The development runs from functional monastic caves to elaborate carved religious complexes, ending in the single-rock Kailash temple at Ellora.

Why are the mural paintings of Ajanta renowned?

SOLUTION

Concept used. Ajanta murals are renowned because they preserve major examples of early Indian painting, show Buddhist themes, use rhythmic lines and volume, and reveal great skill in colour, composition, naturalism and narrative arrangement.

Write theme plus technique

Mention what is painted and how it is painted. Both are needed.

Step 1. Ajanta is the only surviving major example of painting from the first century BCE and the fifth century CE mentioned in the chapter.

Step 2. The paintings show events from the life of the Buddha, Jataka stories and Avadanas.

Step 3. Famous themes include Padmapani, Vajrapani, Mahajanaka Jataka, Vidharpundita Jataka and Chaddanta Jataka.

Step 4. The paintings use clearly defined rhythmic lines and strong contour treatment.

- Step 5.** Body colour merges with the outer line to create a sense of volume.
- Step 6.** The figures show naturalistic postures, expressive faces, movement and refined painterly quality.
- Step 7.** Different skin colours and types of figures suggest a multicoloured population and rich social world.
- Step 8.** The compositions organise events by location and use architectural bands to separate spaces.
- Step 9.** Their survival, beauty, narrative power and technical refinement make the Ajanta murals renowned.

Final Answer: Ajanta murals are renowned for their Buddhist narratives, rhythmic line, volume, naturalistic figures, refined colour use and rare survival as major early Indian paintings.

EXPERT'S SOLUTION : *Kavya Desai, M.A Ancient Indian History, JNU*

Painting-analysis answer. Ajanta matters because it gives both visual beauty and historical evidence.

- Step 1.** The chapter stresses that Ajanta preserves painting from early and later phases, which is rare in Indian art history.
- Step 2.** The subjects are central to Buddhist visual culture: Buddha's life, Jatakas and Avadanas.
- Step 3.** The fifth-century paintings show clear rhythmic lines, energetic contours and careful modelling.
- Step 4.** Figures have volume because colour and line work together rather than staying flat.
- Step 5.** Caves 1, 2, 16 and 17 are especially important for surviving paintings.
- Step 6.** The famous Padmapani and Vajrapani images in Cave No. 1 show the refined quality of the tradition.
- Step 7.** The paintings are also valuable because they show costume, jewellery, expression, movement and narrative space.

Ajanta murals are celebrated for rare survival, Buddhist narrative richness, rhythmic drawing, colour modelling, naturalistic figures and high painterly refinement.

Final Answer: Ajanta murals are celebrated for rare survival, Buddhist narrative richness, rhythmic drawing, colour modelling, naturalistic figures and high painterly refinement.

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Key Takeaways

- Sanchi Stupa-I combines stupa structure, circumambulatory movement and symbolic Buddhist narratives.
- Fifth and sixth century North Indian sculpture shows refinement, calmer volume and regional differences between Mathura and Sarnath.
- Cave architecture grew from chaitya halls and viharas into major complexes such as Ajanta, Ellora and Elephanta.
- Ajanta murals are renowned for Buddhist narratives, rhythmic line, colour modelling

and rare survival.

End of Exercise