

# Mathura, Gandhara, Amravati School Of Art

## Schools of Art in Ancient India

During the start of Christian era (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries), the Buddhism expanded substantially and had stimulated a renewed artistic passion to illustrate the message of Buddha and this lead to the development of three main “schools” of sculpture in India which had evolved their own styles and distinctions. These were named as the Gandhara, Mathura, and Amaravati school of art, after the places of their prominence.

## Gandhara school of art

- The Gandhara school of art had grown around Peshawar (Presently in Pakistan) in Northwest India, during the rule of Indo-Greek rulers but the real patrons of Gandhara school of art were the Sakas and the Kushanas, Kanishka in particular.



*Figure-Meditating Buddha,  
Gandhar, third-fourth century  
CE*

- Many artists from West Asia had settled down in the north-west of India after the Greek invasions and during the period of the Kushanas further, they were deeply influenced by the Graeco-Roman art.
- The Kushana kings, especially Kanishka, motivated the Gandhara artists to carve the themes from Buddha's life and the jatakas thus a large number of the images of the Buddha and the Bodhisattvas were produced.
- Due to the application of Greek Techniques of art to the Buddhist subjects (beautiful images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas) the Gandhara School of Art is also known as the Graeco-Buddhist School of Art.
- Almost all kinds of foreign influences like Greek, Roman, Persian, Saka and Kushan were assimilated in Gandhara style.

- Jalalabad, Begram, Hadda, Bamaran & Taxila were the main centres where art pieces of Gandhara School have been found and the Bamyán Buddha of Afghanistan considered as an example of the Gandhara School.

### **Characteristics of Gandhara School of art**

- The reliefs of the Gandhara Sculpture depict Buddha's birth, his renunciation and his preaching and the best of the sculptures were produced during the first and second centuries A.D.
- The drapery was thick with large and bold fold lines also the human body was cast in a realistic manner with minute attention being given to physical features like a moustache, muscles, and curly hair.

Since ruins of about fifteen monasteries were found in and around Peshawar and Rawalpindi thus it can be concluded that during first to fourth centuries A.D a large number of monasteries were built. The graeco-roman architectural impact was seen in form of an increase of height and additional ornamentation of the Buddhist stupas erected between first to fifth centuries. Moreover, these changes further made the stupa attractive.

### **Mathura School of Art**

Initially, in Gandhara style, a complex form of symbolism was present and Mathura style deviated from it by establishing the tradition of transforming Buddhist symbols into human form accordingly Buddha's first image can be traced to Kanishka's reign.

- In Mathura, an indigenous style of sculpture developed, and it mostly used red sandstone.
- Mathura School of art is famous for its assimilative character since the images of Vaishnava and Shaiva faiths along with Buddhist images are in prevalence in Mathura style.
- The images of Siva and Vishnu along with their consorts Parvathi and Lakshmi were also carved out in the Mathura school moreover the female figures of yakshinis and apsaras of the Mathura school were beautifully carved too. One

thing to note that the images of Shiva and Vishnu were depicted by their ayudhas (weapons).

- The records of Jain Tirthankars are also found in Mathura Style.
- In Mathura School of art which is noted for its vitality and assimilative character, Sarnath and Kausambi also emerged as important centres of art production while the traditional centre, Mathura, remained the main art production site. Many Buddha images in Sarnath have plain transparent drapery covering both shoulders, and the halo around the head has very little ornamentation whereas the Mathura Buddha images continue to depict folds of the drapery in the Buddha images and the halo around the head is heavily decorated.

#### *Characteristics of Mathura School of Art*



Lord Vishnu in Mathura  
School of Art Style

- In Mathura style more, the focus was laid on the internal beauty and facial sentiments rather than bodily gesture.
- There is boldness in carving the large images as the first Mathura image creators never aimed to sculpt an anatomically correct human Buddha.

### **Progression in Mathura School of Art**

- Initially, in early stages the images of Buddha and Bodhisattva are fleshy, with little spirituality and more happiness (faces are round and smiling), garments clearly visible, close-fitting robes almost entirely devoid of folds.
- Later in 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Century AD the extreme fleshiness kept on reducing progressively and images got sensual. Additionally, the halo around the head of Buddha was excessively decorated.

### **Differences Between Mathura School of Arts and Gandhara School of Arts**

- Mathura Style was indigenously developed while Gandhara Style had strong Greek influence and it was based on Greco-Roman Norms (known as Graeco-Buddhist School of Art).
- In Mathura School material used was Spotted Red Sandstone while in Gandhara School, Blue-grey Mica schist / Grey Sandstone was used.
- In Mathura School, during Early period light volume having fleshy body was carved. In later Periods flashiness got reduced and Buddha was carved out in various Mudras. While in Gandhara School images were carved with finer details (Curly hair, anatomical accuracy, spatial depth, and foreshortening) and Buddha carved out in various Mudras.
- In Gandhara Style, the Halo is not decorated, in general, and the images are much expressive while in Mathura Style the halo around the head of Buddha was heavily decorated and the images are less expressive.

In due course of time, it appears that the Mathura, Gandhara arts cross-fertilized, and the result of this synthesis refined and purified the Buddha image that appeared in the Gupta period.

## Amravati School of Art

Amravati Style of Art, evolved in Amaravati, (Andhra Pradesh), was patronized



first by the Satavahanas and later *Carving on outer wall of Stupa, Amaravati* by the Ikshvakus and also by other groups, flourished for nearly six centuries starting from 200-100 BC. Buddhist art and a large religious complex of Buddhism grew around Amravati which represent the revival of uniquely different regional art style. The doctrine changes in Buddhism well as rise and fall of dynasties influenced the evolution of the Amravati School of Art.

### Characteristics of Amravati School of Art

- The material used in Amravati stupas is a distinctive white marble and Amaravati sculptures have a sense of movement and energy with profound and quiet naturalism in human, animal and floral forms.
- Prominent places where this style developed are Amravati, Nagarjunikonda, Goli, Ghantasala and Vengi.
- Symbolic representation of Buddha's life, the Buddha almost always being represented by a symbol, though in two or three places he is personified.

- Like the Sanchi Stupa, the Amaravati Stupa also has pradakshina patha enclosed within a vedika on which many narrative stories from the life of Buddha and bodhisattva dominating such episodes relating to the Birth, the miracles, Enlightenment and the victory over Mara, Sundari, Nanda, Tushita heaven and Angulimala are depicted.
- Sculptural form in Amravati Art is characterised by intense emotions as the figures are slim, have a lot of movement, bodies are shown with three bents (i.e. tribhanga), and the sculptural anatomy is more complex than at Stupa of Sanchi.
- Both religious and secular images were present in this style.
- Later, this style got transformed into Pallava and Chola architecture.

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