

FAQ's

1. What is a Harmika?

A Harmika is a super structure consisting of a square railing enclosing of a pedestal surmounted on the flattened crest of the dome of Buddhist stupas.

2. Explain in brief the characteristics of a Chaitya hall with an example

A Chaitya is a Buddhist shrine or prayer hall with a stupa at one end. The salient features of a Chaitya hall are best explained through the example located in Karle.

- It is an architectural gem shows usual nave in the center divided from the side aisles by pillars and terminating in the apse which contains the stupa.
- There are two solid octagonal columns and two pillars at the sides which forms the vestibule.
- In front of these standing columns stood a pair of simha stambhas (lion pillar). The column with the bell shaped column surmounted by 4 lions back to back resembles the lion pillar at Saranath.
- Above the screen rises a plain wall which has now disappeared. On top of the plain wall stand dwarf pillars, between which light penetrates not only to the vestibule but through the great Chaitya window of the façade to the interior of the magnificent hall.
- The real façade of the Chaitya is crowned by the great window in the form of a horse shoe. Rest of the rock surface has the sculptured figures with small replica of Chaitya windows and railings above them.
- A high barrel vault with ribs formed of separate pieces of wood fixed by plugs into the rock covers the nave.
- The seven remaining pillars without base and capital stands in the apse at the far end around the back of the stupa.
- The central stupa has the Harmika with inverted stepped pyramid and an umbrella
- Three entrances lead into the hall.
- The central one meant for the members of the sangha had a raised pathway into the nave

- 37 pillars adorn the interior of the hall. 30 of them belonging to the opt based type, richly carved. Each stands on a diminishing squares. On this rest the pot like base which appears to hold the bottom of the pillar.
- An inverted lotus capital with the ribbed element placed inside the box above it crowns the octagonal columns. The abacus which repeats the form of the stepped base but in reverse order, supports finely sculptured groups of figures mounted on elephants and horses.

3. Differentiate a Chaitya hall and a Vihara

Chaitya Hall	Vihara
Sacred place of worship	Residential places of Buddhist priests
Rectangular in plan	Squarish in plan
Central nave with aisles on both sides with the main stupa in the centre	Chambers and niches are arranged around assembly halls
Usually Chaitya halls have vaulted ceiling	Viharas usually have flat ceiling

4. Explain the significance of the rock cut architecture in Ajanta and Ellora

- They are situated near Aurangabad in Maharashtra. They are both Chaitayas and Viharas.
- They are cut out of a large rocky plateau. These historical structures are related to Jainism, Buddhism and Hinduism.
- The caves at Ajanta have 24 Buddhist Viharas and five Hindu temples.
- These are carved out of a rock of about 80 metres high and about 380 metres long. The caves of Ajanta are related to both Hinayana and Mahayana sect of Buddhism.
- Some of the finest sculptures and paintings are in the caves at Ajanta. Paintings are found in only a few of these caves, which were created between 100 B.C. and the A.D. 400's.
- Viharas of Ajanta are of different sizes. There is a pillared verandah in front, from which doors and windows lead into the main hall.

- The side walls of the hall have doors for the monks to enter their cells. In the centre of the rear wall is a doorway leading into a shrine having the rock cut image of Buddha which is calm, solemn and inspiring.
- There are many Chaityas at Ajanta, of which the Chaitya number 19 is most remarkable.
- The façade of the Chaitya is decorated with sculptured images. Inside there are two Buddha figures standing in a relaxed pose. At the far end, there is an imposing stupa having the standing image of Buddha.
- The fresco paintings on the walls and ceilings of Ajanta are known for their artistic values.
- The themes of the paintings are drawn from the Jataka tales, legends and real life.
- These paintings reflect all phases of Indian culture from the birth of Buddha to the 8th century A.D.
- In spite of the inclement weather and the passage of time, colours of these paintings are very fresh.