



## **ART OF THE SATAVAHANAS**

Hello everybody and welcome to today's episode. In this episode you will study the development of art during the reign of Satavahanas. Here we will concentrate on the art and architecture of the Deccan under the Satavahanas. The Subject expert is Ms. Shilpi Shankar who is a Curator in Stupa 18 Gallery and I am.

### **Introduction:-**

If we look at the post Mauryan period the emergence of varied and rich schools or art in the sub continent can be seen. The art of different period and regions reached their pinnacle with the support of the religious and economic developments of that era.

**The main power that rose in the Deccan around the first century B.C. was the Satavahana**



**empire.** Satavahanas were the subordinate rulers of Ashoka and later of Sungas. They have been mentioned as Sātavāhanas, Sātakarnīs, Andhras and Andhrabhṛityas in the Puranas and coins.

### ***INTERVIEW OF SUBJECT EXPERT***

India has witnessed the art in the form of sculptures during different ages and this was due to the support of the different kings and the dynasties which ruled in India. With the downfall of the Mauryan Empire in the north, the rulers which united in the south were known as 'Satvahanas'. The Satvahanas ruled in the Deccan either for about 400 years. The Satvahanas were the great builders. The distinct style of sculptures which flourished during the Satvahanas was known as "The Amravati School of Sculpture". This style was known for the high scale and the technical ability of the Amravati sculptors. The distinct features of the Amravati sculpture were the Ayaka pillars, Ayakapatas, Purna kumba motives and Lotus motive.

### **Satavahana dynasty:-**

According to Matsya Purana there were 29 rulers of this dynasty. According to the Puranas, Simukha (C.



221-198 B.C) was the first ruler of the dynasty, although on the basis of evidence such as coins and inscriptions some scholars have argued that he was preceded by Satavahana (C.236-221 B.C) after whom the dynasty was named. He laid the foundation in 235 BC and ruled for 23 years. He was succeeded by his younger brother Kanha or Krishna, after whom Simukha's son Satakarni I (C. 180-170 B.C) came to the throne. He was one of the successful rulers of the dynasty. The sixth ruler of the dynasty Satakarni II (C. 152-96 B.C) had a long and eventful rule. According to the Yuga-Purana he annexed Kalinga after the death of Kharavela. He is said to have extended the Satavahana power over Madhya Pradesh, drove the intruding Sakas out of Pataliputra, which he held for ten years. Gautamiputra Satakarni, the twenty-third ruler of



this dynasty, is known as the greatest of the Satavahana monarchs. Gautamiputra Satakarni was succeeded by his son Vasistiputra Sri Pulamavi, who assumed the title of 'Daksinapateswara'. The last well-known ruler of this dynasty was Sri Yagna Satakarni (c.174-203 A.D) who got back some of the provinces from the Sakas.

### **Religion:-**

The Satavahana period was an age of intense religious activity and religion played an important role in the art. **Both Buddhism and Brahmanism existed during this dynasty.** Buddhism flourished throughout the period and at the same time the rulers were devoted to Vedic rituals. Nagarjunkonda and Amaravati became important Buddhist centers during the Satavahana Era.



God Vishnu, who is identified with Bhaga and Surya in the Veda, was popular in the times of Satavahanas. The incarnations assumed by Vishnu to restrain the evil were popular during this period.

The Garuda, Naga and Kinnaras were the other group of semi-divine beings who were commonly sculptured in the art of Satavahanas. The brahmanical mythology was sculptured at Amaravati and other centers under the Satavahana rule.

**The full size ornate bull (nandisvara) an attractive piece of art picked up from the local Amaresvara temple, dedicated to Lord Siva is one of the best example of existence of Brahmanism during the Satavahana rule.**



## ***INTERVIEW 2 OF SUBJECT EXPERT***

The religion which flourished during the Satvahana period were the Buddhism and at the same time Hinduism. The rulers of the Satvahana dynasty were the followers of Buddhism and they were also doing the Vedic ritualism. During this reason for this reason, the images of the Buddha is found in both the iconic form. In the early period, when the Buddhism are in its Hiniana phase, the Buddha was represented through the symbols such as footprint, begging bowl, Boddhi tree. But in the later phase, with the coming of the Buddhist saint "Naga- arjuna" the Mahayana sect was involved. So due to the Mahayana sect, the Buddha was depicted in the form of human. The human form of Buddha was more



cylinder and less massiveness in comparison to the earlier period

### **Art and Architecture:-**

The glory of the Satavahanas is rightly reflected from the tradition of art and architecture, which was grown and developed by them during their reign. The sculpture of this period is mostly of architectural execution.

The Satavahana rulers are known for their contributions to Buddhist art and architecture. **The Satavahanas left behind them many works of art, the remains of various Buddhist monuments and sites are seen at Amaravati, Nagarjunkonda, Jaggayyapeta, Goli etc, which came up in Andhra.**



Amaravati stupa is one of the oldest brick-built stupas in South India. The mastery of Satavahanas can be noted from the sculptures at Nagarjunkonda. **Throughout the sculptures the main themes is of showing various episodes revolving around the Buddha and his life.** But the outstanding example of the sculptures from later period of that ages and art of Satavahanas is the depiction of the Enlightened Buddha. **The images of Buddha (where represented in human form) are mainly in the “sthanaka” or “asana” and excellently represented a calm oval face of Buddha with a moderately built body.** The images in the sitting position shows striking similarity with each others in carving rounded shoulders. In many images, the right hand of





Buddha is held up to give a symbolic gesture of “abhaya” or “pravachana” mudra.

### **Regional centers of Art during Satavahanas:-**

#### **Amaravati :-**

Amaravati, which was the capital of the ancient Satavahana dynasty, came under influence of the Buddhist faith through the Kushanas of Mathura.

**Amaravati School of art, a thoroughly native school of sculpture, flourished in the lower valley of Krishna and Godavari and was distinguished by its white or greenish white limestone.** The themes of these sculptural representations on the stupas are from Jataka Tales and also from the social life.

**In the early stages of Amaravati Art, Buddha was depicted in the decorated panels in**



**symbolic.** Amaravati School of art is well known for the rich ayaka pillars and ayakapatas.

The Hinayana sculptor in Amaravati had adopted the symbolic method for sculpting the life of Buddha in stone. They were wise enough to choose four principal events from the life of Buddha they took every care not to sculpt the image of Buddha. They depicted the birth of Buddha in the form of a lotus creeper emerging out of a vessel. The enlightenment was depicted by placing the forms of a throne and the footprints under a tree. The first sermon was represented by creating a wheel over a pillar, for the first sermon was called "dharmachakra pravartana". The mahaparinirvana is shown by sculpting the form of a stupa by which were seated the adorers.



**The Amaravati School started depicting the Buddha as a divine being and receiving worship in later phase.** The iconic presentation of Buddha was common till this period. The life- size standing Buddha image in super human form, bearing the physical symbols of a great man, referred to as the Maha Purusha Lakshana.

Numerous changes are visible in the sculptural style of the period, compared with earlier period. **In general, the flat linear, simple carvings of the first century BC were superseded by deeply carved, crowded, active and more naturalistic appearing works by the second century AD.**

The sculptures of the stupa here are quite different in style from those of northern India. The figures of Amaravati have slim blithe features and they are



represented in most difficult poses and curves. The figures have attained greater freedom of movement, gestures and attitudes along with an increased plasticity and refinement of the physical mass. For example these differences can be easily seen in the Chhadanta Jataka from Amaravati and Bharhut.

The vitality and movement in the figures can be seen in the famous medallion showing demigods with slender and long legged figures carrying Buddha's begging bowl to heaven. The sculptural representations were composed in such an integrated manner that they give the impression of painting.

The Amaravati stone sculptures provide generous information on dress and ornaments, of the women



in those days. Among the ornaments there is long yagnopaveeta stringed in pearls which can be seen.

Amaravati sculptors in comparison to earlier style preferred shallower carving and gave importance to linearity. Although characterized by broad, heavy shoulders for male figures and large breasts and wide hips for females, Amaravati sculptural figures are supple and graceful. For example: - If we compare the reliefs of Taming of Nalgiri from Bharhut and Amaravati there are differences between their style and contents. In the Amaravati scene there is a strong inclination towards the juxtaposition. The apparent flatness and archaic style of Bharhut clearly did not attain the high level



of sophistication as in Amaravati. The mastery of perspective also reaches maturity in Amaravati.

### INTERVIEW 3 OF SUBJECT EXPERT

If we see the art of Mathura and the Satvahanas, there are some similarities and differences. In the art of Mathura, which concentrated on the execution of single figure, on the other hand, the Satvahanas sculptures were more crowded and flat in execution. Amravati school carried to the fullest limit of its development. There were some similarities in the execution of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva images in both Mathura and the Satvahana sculptures. But the massiveness of the Mathura sculptures were softened in the Amravati sculptures.

Architecturally Amaravati was a brilliant synthesis and advancement from Bharhut and Sanchi. Amaravati also developed a unique artistic style that was the representative of South India collectively named Andhra style and it became profoundly influential in the subsequent arts in India.



Amaravati is very famous for its massive stupa, which had 162ft diameter, 100ft height and a railing of 192ft in diameter. The Amravati Stupa dates back to around 2000 years and are as tall as the Sanchi Stupa. It is also known as the Mahastupa or Deepaladinne and was made by a representative of Emperor Ashoka. It is made of brick and consists of a circular vedika.

**The ayaka platforms and ayaka stambhas were the distinct features of this stupa.** This stupa had 4 Ayakastambhas erected on 4 cardinal points. The yashti-chatra was occasionally substituted by an octagonal pole or yupa yasti while the ornate toranas were completely replaced with freestanding animal crowned pillars. The dome and the base of the



Amaravati stupa is elaborately sculptured. Jataka stories were incised on marble slabs. The upper part of the dome is a beautiful floral design. And the stupa at this place had a marble railing with relief-sculptures.

#### ***INTERVIEW 4 OF SUBJECT EXPERT***

Ayaka was the being with the sequence of subjects. The Ayakas were divided into rectangles displaying the scenes from the life of Buddha and the Jataka tales. The reliefs of the Amravati are one of the best examples of the traditional narrative are displaying the Jataka tales. In the later phase, the execution, The the mastery in the execution of human form can be seen in these sculptures. The figures of the Amravati sculptures are full of movements and life. They are full of sensuousness and naturalism. The execution of these figures are composed in such a way that they give an impact of painting. These sculptures are more pictorial in execution and are full of plasticity.





Besides a few drum slabs and dome slabs depicting the worship of Stupa, Triratna, animal rows, yakshas and minor antiquities like coins and beads are interesting.

The main symbols of Amaravati is the famous Barbhagriha, is a long vertical marble cylinder that have been used extensively in the Buddhist monuments and the white marble lotus medallion bearing detailed, delicate Buddhist designs. They are also symbols typically of the early Buddhist sculptural style. The lotus and the purnakumbha motifs are typical of Amaravati Art. These symbols stand for wealth and auspiciousness.

The Satavahanas were the first dynasty of Indian origin to issue coins with royal portraits. **They were**



**the first Native Indians who had issued the coins with portraits of their kings which reflect the strong nationalistic attitude of the Satavahanas.** The use of Prakrit script and the Dravidian language on the backside of the coin by the Satavahanas is also interesting.

The portrait heads represented on Satavahana coins are significant for their clarity and articulation. With the help of these coins, historians came to know about their culture and history.

Amaravati sculptures speak of naturalism and sensuousness of Amaravati artist. The quality of the surface enhances the beauty of sculptures. The scenes are over-crowded and the technical excellence is very admirable. Many of the figures are simply elongated stick figures resembling ivory



carvings. Spontaneous energy, grace and dynamism come out of the carved stone figures.

Eroticism is also a predominant feature of these Satavahana sculptures. The female figures are carved sensuously and the erotic appeal of figures and situations is felt easily. Delicate and alluring female forms with full breasts, heavy hips and serpentine suppleness are seen here to jostle one another. In comparison to art of Mathura, the sensuousness of Amaravati seems to be more refined. It is indeed the most voluptuous art.

Technically, each composition is knit together by rhythmic lines that portray the movements and directions of the figures. Human figure in this art replaces the plant and appears in all plasticity,



liveliness and flexibility. The movements slide from figure to figure and bind together the whole scene.

**Undoubtedly, the Amaravati School of Art, attain a completely novel and distinctive place in the Indian plastic art. The renowned art historian Stella Kramrisch had written that the Indian sculpture attains its classicism in the Amaravati sculptures.**

### ***INTERVIEW 5 OF SUBJECT EXPERT***

Talking about the Amravati art, the British captain and the author of the book and historical relation of the island Shillon, Robert Knox, divided the Amravati art into 2 phases, the early phase which was known as "Archive phase" and the later phase which was known as "High phase". According to him, in the second phase, the high phase which was the high phase of the Amravati art was the perfection of the Indian art. According to him, the art of India never reached the perfection like this at any other time, the early phase was Archive due to the flatness of the figures and the massiveness of the body and the drapery which was executed with the Buddha



sculptures. In the later phase, the figures became more cylindrical and full of movement.

### **Nagarjunkonda:-**

Another centre of showing the Satavahana Art is Nagarjunkonda. The sculptural tradition of Amaravati seems to continue at the art of this place. This place was named after Nagarjuna who was one of the great Buddhist scholar and founder of Mahayana Buddhism. The Buddhist themes dominate the artistic creations.

The compositions of the reliefs are animated, the figures are more thin and slender, and the spatial arrangements more refined. The sculptors of Nagarjunakonda sculpted diverse scenes. In these sculptures not only religious subjects but also various secular themes are found.



The large stupa is decorated with a large garland-ornament. The stupa is 18 meters in height and measure 32.3 meters in diameter and 4 meters width. The stupa had a circular central column, with eight radial walls gathering a peripheral circular wall. The intrinsic stone sculpture along with slab carvings depicting the life of Buddha.

It also features a monolithic statue of Buddha which is 10ft high.

### **Jaggayyapeta:-**

Another centre of Satavahanas was Jaggayyapeta. During the excavations in 1818, a few carved slabs from one of the brick mounds revealed the existence of a group of ancient stupas. After excavation, the stupa was found to be 9 meters in diameter and was decorated with slabs of the same material used in



Amaravati. Inside the casing the stupa is made completely out of bricks and earth. **The most interesting as well as important of the marbles here is a slab representing a Chakravartin.**

The slab representing the seven jewels which surround him – the queen, the prince, the minister, the elephant, the horse, the wheel, and the gems – state him to the world as a king of kings. Remarkable features of this sculpture are the square coins that are showered on the emperor from the sky and the jewels worn by the human figures and also the elongated structure of those figures which represent different approach from the stunted representations of the Gandhara School.



The standing relief of Buddha is incomparable, not merely because it was found undamaged, but also because it differs both in age and style from the other artworks found here. It has an inscription on its lotus base in characters of the sixth century.

### **Goli:-**

The numbers of stupas were also constructed at Goli. To the last period of Amaravati belong to the fine sculptures from the stupa near Goli in Guntur district. The remains of a stupa were found in 1926 at the village of Goli about 30 miles west of Amaravati. The similarity of subject matter, finish and pose are remarkable. The costumes of Buddha closely resemble those found in the fourth period of Amaravati.





### **Scholars on Amaravati School of Art:-**

Among the all school of early Indian sculpture, Amaravati is the most extremely dramatic, and by one eminent scholar it is observed as:-

A passionate sense for everything terrestrial manifests itself (in the art of Amaravati), as if Indian Art had taken leave of this world with tumultuous feast, before deliberately entering the cold fields of spirituality. (Bachofer,1929)

A.K.Coomaraswamy, pioneering historian and philosopher of Indian art has appropriately described about the Amaravati School of Art as "the most voluptuous and delicate flower of Indian sculpture."

According to Scottish architectural historian James Fergusson, "In each the subject of the sculpture is varied but the general design is the same



throughout, and on the whole, the woodcut may be taken as representing the mode in which a Buddhist stupa was ornamented in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century, at which time the style seems to have reached its highest point of elaboration, in India at least.

At Jaggayypeta some of the reliefs found in the neighborhood bearing a strong resemblance to these of Amaravati and some had been utilized to carve on them Hindu divinities.

Sir John Marshall, British archaeologist of the early twentieth century has pointed out that “great originality, freedom of treatment”, and spontaneous exuberance” can be seen in Amaravati sculptures.



C. Sivaramamurti, an eminent art historian divided Amaravati sculptures into four phases:-

->Phase I(c.200-100BCE):- Some pieces displayed an archaic style similar to the vedikas of Sanchi stupa I-III and subsequent sculptures of Yakshas, Yakshi's etc also exhibited a style akin to Bharhut. Toward the end of this phase, there emerged a new style comparable to the Sanchi toranas.

->Phase II(c.100CE):- The appearance of Buddha in the human form began late in this phase, however aniconic representations, in particular the flaming pillar, remained popular.

->Phase III(c.150CE):-The production of Amaravati sculptures reached its peak as the carvings were generally refined graceful and also manneristic in



behaviour and postures and the reliefs are densely carved.

-> Phase IV(c.200-250CE):- The artistic centre shifted from Amaravati to Nagarjunkonda.

When Hiuen Tsiang, a Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler, and translator visited the place in the year 639 he said "it was ornamented with all the magnificence of the palaces at Baktria. Amaravati school of sculpture was produced, but with a stronger classical influence than anything of its kind found elsewhere in India.

### **Influences:-**

Some of the Buddhist sculptures of Amaravati show Greco influence that was the direct result of the close



trade between south India and the ancient Romans. The empire had commercial contacts with the Roman Empire, as indicated by the discovery of a large number of Roman coins at several places on the coast.

Some Scholars believe that Greco-Roman influences have a great share in styling the stupas at Amaravati and other places in the Krishna Valley, and Greek lamps are mentioned in an inscription from Alluru. They acted as a bridge between North and South India.

**In context the sculptural style was Indic but a direct influence of perspective and the naturalism of Roman art can be seen on it. Most Amaravati sculptures, like those of Gandhara, were produced for the Buddhist monuments.**



The Satavahana sculptures at Amaravati reflect the influence of both the Gandhara and Mathura school of art. Depiction of Buddhist monks in Amaravati, which were conspicuously absent in Bharhut and Sanchi, suggest Gandhara influence.

The influence of Amaravati School was seen on later surrounding school of art in deccan and southern parts. Amaravati style was profoundly influential as an artistic foundation for the subsequent flowering of the brilliant and classical Gupta style in north. In some of the technical details of the sculptors, notably in the treatment of drapery, the influence of classical art is perceptible and was seen in art of later period. Its influence on later south Indian



sculpture is also evident. Its products were carried to Ceylon and Southeast Asian countries.

The best pieces of these refined limestone sculptures recovered at the site were taken away to British Museum, London, while the bulk of the artifacts were shifted and housed at the Government Museum in Chennai.

**The post Mauryan era can be rightly termed as the "Golden Age" in the Indian History.** The religious and economic conditions during this period acted as catalyst for various school of art to develop and also to reach its glory.