CHAPTER-II
BACKGROUND OF INDIAN ART HISTORY

The discovery of the remains of the Indus Valley Civilization in the year 1922-23 gives us an impression that Indian civilization is about 5000 years old. Architecturally and sculpturally the Indus Valley Civilization is one of the oldest centre of the world. According to A. K. Coomaraswamy, "India in centuries and perhaps millennia B.C. was an integral part of an ancient east that extended from the Mediterranean to the Ganges Valley." In this ancient world there prevailed a common type of culture, which may well have had a continuous history extending upwards from the stone age.

The people of Indus Valley showed their excellence of art not only in terracotta but also in limestone and bronze. Such images are found at Harappa, Mohenjodaro, Chanhu-daro and Baluchistan etc. The Indus valley people were experts in the art of house building, stone and clay statuary, bronze casting, making ornaments of gold and silver and cutting of beads in various semi precious stones, like agate, carnelian, ivory-carving and reflect the refined taste of their makers. Amongst stone statuary, a fine piece of sculpture found at Mahenjodaro shows a

2. Coomarswami, A. K., History of Indian and Indonesian Art, p. 13
male bust draped in a shawl, which is decorated with trefoil pattern. The figure wears a short beard and a close cut moustache. This is an impressive piece with its suggestive and symbolical expression. The bronze-dancing girl from Mahenjodaro is a charming little statuette. Loaded profusely with bangles, she stands in a buoyant pose, with rather elongated legs and arms and with the head slightly tilted. The vast number of terracotta figurines of men and animals from the Indus Valley Civilization which comprises a very remarkable group. A female figure, the great mother goddess, is typical of this civilization. The high crested head dress, the chaplets round the neck, the long series of pendant necklaces and the broad girdle indicate the profound reverence of the artist who conceived and modelled the figures of various animals, like the humped bull, dog, sheep, elephant, rhinoceros, pig, several kinds of birds and the wide variety of clay toys. Some of their artists made animal figurines, ornaments and beads made of faience, which are regarded as masterpieces of their craftsmanship. These materials are sufficient to prove that the artists of Indus Valley made a conscious effort and penetrated all aspects of life, enhancing its beauty. The Indus people developed a well-established urban culture depending on agriculture and trade. Their sculpture reflects a society urban in attitude and primitive in concept.

As the Vedic people have left no images, it is difficult to presume whether they had images or not. According to Percy Brown, the early Vedic people were nomads practising pastoral economy with their
habitations in rudimentary huts of reeds, bamboos and leaves. In spite of the rudimentary character, these huts served as an inspiration to the future stūpa, chaitya and temples of India. The gods of the Rgveda can be classified under three heads viz, Dyausthana (i.e, the celestial) Antarikṣasthana, (i.e., the intermediate, atmospheric), prthivisthana (i.e. the terrestrial gods). The Vedic people worshipped their gods by offering oblations to fire. The god Agni was the carrier of their offerings to the various gods. The vedic gods were conceptual. The concept of the gods in these days was just an imagination of the hymnists. On the other hand literature or art reflect the contemporary society directly or indirectly.

The vedic gods, such as Agni (fire-god), Vāyu (wind-god), Āditya (Sun-god), Pithvī (the earth goddess), Chandra (the moon god) etc. did not resemble the human beings in form. No vedic temple or sculpture has been discovered till now. They worshipped gods without anthropomorphic form. Indra was the foremost god of the vedic pantheon. He was regarded as the great fighter. Because, during that period the Aryan people had to fight hundreds of battles for their survival. With the establishment of various states, they wanted peace for their prosperity and peaceful co-existence with non-Aryan people,

N. B : Faience is special paste made of crushed steatite. It was casted with a glaze and fused in a kiln, to produce extreme fines of texture and a light blue as greenish colour.

and by this time Viṣṇu became the foremost god who could destroy the troublemakers and protect the just. Thus, the development of art was dependent on the environment in which men lived. Gradually, with the emergence of Brahmanical theism, the sacrifices had become very popular in the later Vedas. Bhakti-mārga (the path of devotion) became a special way of worshipping the personal gods. The idea of Bhakti in the various sectarian religious groups resulted in the development of the image making and image worship. The religious history of India is that of the tradition of continuity and creative transformation.

The real Indian arts begin from the time of the Mauryas. India reached the highest watermark of its artistic achievement during that Mauryan Age. Prof. Lunia observed that the Mauryas were the pioneers in the field of art. During the Mauryan period art received royal patronage. "The Mauryan art has its special features; the Mauryan art is more or less personal and its aim was to impress upon the people the glory and the grandeur of Mauryan Empire." 4

The most important feature of the Maurya period is the use of stone, which came to be used all over the country for both sculpture and architecture. Another distinguished feature, unique in the creation of Mauryan art, is the bright polish imparted to stone surface. Mauryan art

is notable for the bewildring variety of its creation. We have, for example, the pillar capitals with human sculptures and several other motifs.

Under the patronage of Asoka (272-232B.C.) Mauryan sculptures found its most eloquent expressions. The monuments of his reign include monolithic stone pillars, abacus, 40ft. to 50ft. high, adorned with animal capitals of striking craftsmanship. They stand on the grounds without any base or platform. The round shafts of the columns are plain, devoid of all decoration, yet they impress the beholder with lustrous polish and precision of modelling. The pillar at Lauriya Nandangarh is remarkable for its tall shaft. The bull capital of the Rampūrva pillar constitute the high watermark of animal sculptures. But the place of honour is taken by the lion capital of Sārnāth pillar. This consists of four parts, namely, an inverted lotus covered with long sweeping petals surmounted by a circular drum showing four cakras facing the four directions,—a horse, a lion, an elephant and a bull. On the top of this round abacus are four addorsed lion facing cardinally, majestic figures conceived with the utmost realism. They served as a pedestal for a big Dharma-cakra. The sculpture is charged with deep symbolism. The Dharma-cakra represents Dharma or the Law of the Buddha, while the lions represent the temporal power of an emperor (Cakravartin), who has dedicated all his resources to the victory of Dharma (Dharma-vijaya). The symbolism of Indian art attained its highest expression in the Sārnāth capital.
Asoka is known to have built a large number of imposing stūpas during his reign. These were made of bricks and earth, but capped by railings and parasol of stone with the intricate carving and brilliant polish associated with Mauryan art. Asoka's edicts were found at different parts of the country. One important colossal carving at Dhauli, the old capital of Kalinga deserves mention. From the stylistic point view, this sculpture is truly Indian. The yakṣṇī found at Didarganj in Patna district is a rare specimen of figure-sculpture showing beauty and joie de vivre. To quote Vasudev S. Agrawal: "Indian sculptures in this period exhibits no feeling of asceticism, but on the contrary, reflects a mood of bubbling happiness."  

The Śuṅgas ascended the Magadhan throne after the Mauryas. They did not keep continuity of the Mauryan art style. The Mauryan art and architecture was elitist and of court culture. It has no root in folk art. The Śuṅga art, on the other hand, grew out of folk-art and rooted to the grass-root level. According to N. C. Roy, 'the Bhārhūt, Buddhagaya, Sāñci and Amarāvatī reliefs are stores of real life carved in stone'.

It was religious phase in which local cult centering a yakṣas, nāgas, nāginīs et. played an important part as shown by profile sculptures of the monuments of Bhārhūt and Sāñci. Most of the sculptures are frontally....

6. Roy, N.R., Political History of India, p. 112
conceived and loaded with heavy ornaments and drapery. During the Śuṅga period, the Sānchi-stūpa was enriched by the addition of stone railings and four gateways of stone,—all embellished with an inexhaustible wealth of jātaka-legends from Buddha's life, decorative designs, human and animal sculptures of infinitive variety and charm.

The Bharhut-stūpa was built in the middle of the second century. The Sānchi-stūpa sculptures were too human in outlook, and while carving human images, they made a synthesis between physical beauty and inward spirit. Some of the yakṣini figures, such as the Chula kokā devatā, yakṣini sudarśanā and śiri mā devatā show the excellence of human figure-sculpture, of which Śuṅga artists were capable. The joy of life is fully expressed in the smile of yakṣinīs in the reverly of procession and devotional postures of couples. Animals are also a part of life. Elephant, black deer represent the fauna and the lotus, pipal-tree, creepers represent the flora.

The contribution of the Sātavāhanas in the field of art is also great. The remains of the stūpas and sculptures of this period have been found in the sites in Andhra at Gali, Jaggayyapetta, Ghanṭṇashālā, Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā. The stūpas of Amarāvatī are the largest and the finest in quality. The sculptures of Amarāvatī and Nāgārjunakoṇḍā are truly inspired works and display a mastery in which detailed ornamentation, and the elegance of figure-sculpture are joined
in a rare harmony. At present, most of the Amarāvatī sculptures are preserved in the British Museum and the Madras Museum. The white limestone of the sculpture creates the illusion of marble and freshness. It is a sensous art, reflecting the joys of a people who had adopted the way of the Buddha as the new path of freedom and not of estrangement from the world.

Gandhāra art:

From the 1st century B.C. to almost the end of the fifth century A.D. a new school of art flourished in the north-west of India. It is commonly known as the Gandhāra School of Art. The main centers of the Gandhāra school of art were at Jalalabad in Afganisthan, Swat Valley in Hadda and Bamiyan in Peshawar district. Gandhāra province was the centre of Mahāyānismo, and at Gandhāra Indian, Roman, Chinese, Iranian and Greek—all these cultures embraced each other. Hence, the art of this province is naturally influenced by the art of the west. In the age of Kaniṣka, Gandhāra received great patronage from him and flourished to a great deal. Large collections of this specimens of Gandhāra art have been found in the Punjab and Gandhāra region. They are now exhibited in the Museums at Calcutta, Lahore and Peshwar. According to S. K. Saraswati, "Gandhāra art is a testimony of the Greek, Śaka, Kushanas. The Greek sculptors devoted their genius to the service of Indian Buddhism by modelling Buddha images in Greek technique."  

The special features of the Gandhāra art are the following:

1. The sculptures were executed on stone, stucco, terracotta and clay. They were, however, always embellished with gold leaf or paint.

2. Indian sages, yakṣas, Garuḍas are depicted in Greek style of Greek gods like Atlantes, Bacchus, Zeus, Heracles etc.

3. While Hellenistic-Roman styles were applied to Indian subjects, the artists esteemed the local taste by adding moustache, ornaments, turbans etc.

4. The forms of images are proportioned in depth and surface in Greco-Roman style, while the mudrā or the eyes and āsanas are depicted in Indian fashion.

The Gandhāra art spread from north-west India to central Asia.

Sir John Marshall has pointed out that, 'Gandhāra art never took its real hold on India. This was due to opposite temperaments of the two peoples. To the Greek men, beauty and intellect was everything. It was the binate of Hellenic art. But these things had no impact in Indian mind. As a whole Gandhāra art failed to make any deep and permanent impact on Indian sculpture. The Gandhāra art to Indian mind was a colonial art which has no root in India.'

Mathura:

During the Kushana period, Mathura emerged as the new centre of art. Under the rule of the Kushana emperors, like Kaniska, Huvishka and Vasudeva, the art of Mathura began to develop. The golden age of Mathura school of sculpture coincides with the first three centuries of the Christian era. The sculptures were inspired by new ideals of Mahayana Buddhism, which concentrated on Bhakti. The creation of Buddha images is the greatest contribution of the Mahayana artists. The subjects handled by them were of great variety. For example, images of Buddha and Buddhisattvas in seated and free standing poses of both normal human size, images of *yakṣas* and *yakṣinīs* continuing the tradition of the ancient model of the Prakham *yakṣa*, *nāga* and *nāginīs*, and the god Kubera are of Hellenestic models, but at times thoroughly Indianised.

A large number of architectural pieces consisting of beautiful railings, pillars and *torana* architraves, *śalabhanjikā* as well as the female figure of Mathura school have been discovered. The Kushana art reflects a remarkable synthesis in the religious culture and aesthetic spheres. The Kushana art of Mathura represents an important formative stage in the history of Indian art.

Gupta style:

The sculptures achieved extraordinary progress during the Gupta age. Indian sculptural art had reached its zenith during this period. The
sculptures of different styles, rising in the Kushana period could be seen in their most developed and vast form in the Gupta period. R. C. Majumdar observed: “With the Gupta period we enter upon the classical phase of Indian sculpture.” By the efforts of centuries of techniques of art were perfected and definite types were evolved, and the deals of beauty were formulated with precision. There were no more groping in the dark and no more experiments. A thorough intelligent grasp of true aims and essential principles of art, a highly developed aesthetic sense and masterly execution with steady hands produced these remarkable images which were to be the ideal and despair of the Indian artist in subsequent ages.

The Gupta sculptures not only remained models of Indian art in all times to come, but they also served as such in the Indian colonies on the far east.

The style of sculpture originally developed at Mathurā was carried to perfection in Sarnāth where Buddha first turned the wheel of law. Mathurā and Sārnāth is two main storehouses of Gupta sculpture. In Bhārhūt and Śānci the subject matter of sculpture were animal figures and trees. But the Gupta sculpture at Mathurā and Sārnāth had surpassed this limitation. Human figure or divine figure carved in human form enlivened with spiritual meaning and physical grance, marked the Gupta

sculptural style. The Gupta images of gods and goddesses were made in human form. The images were shown of the earthliness of Mathurā school and were raised to a state of mental elevation, spiritual and rational existence. The faces of the figure glow with wisdom, knowledge of the inner meaning of life, their eyes look into the heart with drooping eyelids instead of looking into the world. The Buddhisattva images found at Buddha Gaya belonged to the 4th century A.D. The Buddha image of Mathurā is also an excellent piece of sculpture. N. R. Roy stated that, “the Mathurā images in spite of external perfection lack material values.” The expression of peace and divine joy is absent in them. But the Sārnāth images of Buddha are full of inner meaning combined with beautiful perfection. The Buddha images are either in standing or sitting position. The Dharma-cakra-pravartana images of Sārnāth made in limestone are most excellent. The Buddha is sitting in vayrāsana and his two hands are folded with the mudrā of dharma-cakra-pravartana. The face is glowing with divine splendour, indifferent to misery and joy of life. Images of Hindu deities were also carved in Sārnāth style. The Durgā images of Videha, the Śiva images of Bhumara, full of inner meaning and divine greatness, speak of Sārnāth style.

The Pāla School of Art:

By the influence of the Guptas, a new school of art was developed in eastern parts of India, specially in modern Bangladesh, Bengal and Bihar from the 8th century A.D. to 13th century A.D. These groups of
sculptures were mostly patronised by the Pala-Sena dynasties of eastern India. The Pāla school of sculptures and architecture have been refereed to by Taranath as the 'Eastern School' or Pāla (Pāla-Sena) School. However, early Assam did not remain aloof from this art influence. The art reached in a culminating position with a creative effort of the Pāla artists.

The developments took place in the field of stone sculptural architecture, bronzes and paintings, literature, epigraphs etc. Nalanda was its greatest and most active centre during 9th and 10th century, maintaining cultural contact with the Sailendra Empire of Sumatra and Java, Indonesia, Nepal and Burma. Iconographically these stages of Nalanda art can be recognized namely, an early Mahāyāna phase with Buddha and Boddhisattva, both in stone and bronze. Stone sculptures of the Pāla School are found at Nalanda Rājagṛha, and Buddha Gaya, Rjshahi etc. The hoard of Pāla bronzes found at Kurkihar shows art at the pinnacle of its technical and aesthetic development.

Orissa School of Art:

A vast series of temples at Bhubaneswar, Puri and Konark in Orissa illustrates the development of art and architecture from 8th century to 13th century A.D. The most important of them are the Paraśurāmeśvara (750 A.D.), Muktesvara (950 A.D.), Liṅgarāja (1000), Rājā-Rāṇī (1150 A.D.) and a gigantic Sun temple at Konark fashioned

like a chariot moving on twelve giant wheels drawn by seven horses. The style is Indo-Aryan, illustrating the curvilinear Nāgara sikhara on the main sanctuary and a series of pyramidal stones rising on the roof of the jagmohana or the mandapa. These special features are profusely ornamented on the outer walls relieved by projections and the surfaces, everywhere is adorned with the richest sculpture of its kind comprising dancing male and female figures and decorative patterns of the most exquisite character. The inner wall surfaces are quite plain.

The sculpture of the Rāja-Rāni temple and the torana archway in front of the Muktesvara temple are works of true genius, the latter being regarded as original in conception and work of an artist of superb vision and skill. The Muktesvara shrine has sculptured ornamentation on the inner walls also.

Khājurāho temples:

Khājurāho is now a small place, a few miles from Chhatarpur (M.P.). It has about 30 temples, all erected within a period of 100 years (950-1050 A.D.). Under the patronage of the Chandela kings and dedicated to Śiva, Viṣṇu and Jaina pontiffs. They all stand on a high terrace. There is a strange harmony between their elavotional and horizontal aspects, in the achievement of which the designers showed great intelligence and aestheric sense. The high plinth is relieved by a series of mouldings forming the jagati-pitha. The central portion or the mandapa encloses the sanctum and the mandapa of the interior artistically, with a horizontal row of window openings. On this portion
stands the great series of sculptures in a double or triple row, all of exquisite workmanship and intexhaustible designs. The roofs above the sanctum and several mandapas show a compact mass of solid mountain like height comprising the tall and straight sikhara of the sanctum and the square pyramidal roof over the mandapas. The interiors of Khajuraho temples are most intricately carved.

Among the dozen main shrines of Khajuraho, the temple of the Kandariya Mahadeva is the largest. The Śiva temple of Viśnunātha and the Viṣṇu temple of Chaturbhuja are example of the pañcāyatana type with four additional corner shrines.

Chalukyan art:

Art made a significant progress under the patronage of the Chalukya kings in the Deccan in the during 6th -7th century A.D. There were three main centres of art during this period. They were Aihole, Badami and Pattadkal. The group of temples at Badami and Aihole show a juxtaposition of the Nāgara and Drāvida sikhara styles. The mandapas are adorned with richly carved lintels, beautiful images and trellis-work of indigenous designs According to Coomaraswami, “the pillars of varandah in some of these temples are decorated with triple brackets ornamented with magnificent human figures in the full bloom of Gupta abundance.”

Excellent specimens of slabs facing the entablature of the mandapas are carved in bold relief with the figures of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu. Another figure of Viṣṇu seated on Ananta from an old
temple at Aihole shows the Chalukyan style at its best. The Pallava style sculptures are found in the later groups of Chalukyan sculptural art. The Virūpākṣa temple at Pattadakal, near Badami, was built in about 740 A.D. in imitation of the Kailāśnāth temple of Kānchi. It displays architectural excellence of a high order, besides being notable for its numerous sculptured lintels and slabs showing Rāmāyaṇa scenes and representations of Śiva. The Rāmeśvara cave temple at Ellora belongs to the Chalukyan period of 7th century A.D. Inside the cave is a four armed dancing Śiva imbued with the rare quality of Chalukyan figure sculpture. In the Daśāvatāra cave temple of the same century at Ellora is a very fine sculpture showing the death of Hiraṇyakaśipu. In 753 A.D. the Rāṣṭakūṭas established themselves in the Deccan as successors of the Chalukyas. Their creation both in architecture and sculpture are impressive. The Kailāśa temple at Ellora was built during the reign of Kriṣṇa-II which represents the boldest attempt in the field of rock-cut architecture.

In the second half of the sixth century, on an island near the west coast, was built the cave shrine of Elephanta. It was dedicated to Śiva, whose images as Maheśa counts amongst the most magnificent art creation of India. The sculptures in the Elephanta caves are incomparable both in character and plastic quality.

Pallava art:

The Pallavas in the south were great patrons of art, especially in cave temple architecture. The first capital was at Veṅgi in the Godavari-
Krishna delta and then Kāṇṭhīpuram. King Siṃhavīṣṇu in (575 to 600) lost Veṅgarī to the Chalukyas. His son Mahendravarman (600 to 625 A.D.) and his son and successor Narasimhavarman, popularly known as Mahāmalla, were great builders in the history of Tamil civilization.

Mahābalipuram has a number of rock cut caves. In one of these, the Ādivarāha cave of 7th century A.D., are the effigies of Mahendravarman and his two queens, the latter typified by their slender forms. The rock cut cave is known as mandapas and displays many splendid sculptures. The Ādivarāha cave shows Gaj-Lakṣmī on a high pedestal in the midst of four female attendants. The Durgā cave shows a very remarkable group, Mahiṣa-mardini, a dynamic eight armed figure riding a lion and confronting the buffalo headed demon Mahisha. In the pañca-Pāṇḍava cave, there are two impressive reliefs, one showing Kṛṣṇa lifting the Govardhana, and other depicting him in the scene of milking cows. The five monolithic temples, known as rathams belong to the reign of Mahamalla. They are the earliest specimens of rock-cut temple art, illustrating different types of superstructures. The Dhatmarāja-ratham is the highest and has a portrait of Mahamalla himself. The Draupadi-ratham is the most elegant in this group. A third type of Pallava monument is the magnificent open air carving in relief on a rock surface. The one known as ‘Arjuna’s penance’, in fact, represents the Gaṅgāvataraṇa. Two large boulders with a narrow figure are carved with several rows of figures of gods and goddesses. In the centre is a ṛṣi standing on his left foot and on his right is the figure of Śiva. There are
other figures of gods and goddess, hunters and wild animals. The ṛṣi, seated with bent back in front of a praṇa-śālā-type of temple, is identified as Bhagiratha, who performed severe austerities for the descent of Gaṅgā. In the reign of Rājā Simha, the rock cut technique was abandoned, and was replaced by the structural temple of masonry and stone. The stone temple at Mahābalipuram is the first example of this style. The garbhagṛha of the temple is towards the sea. To its west is a maṇḍapa. The famous Kailāsanātha temple of Kāñchī is the most developed form of this style built about 700 A.D. Its main part is garbhagṛha which has pyramidal tower over it. A little ahead of it, a maṇḍapa is built separately. Some centuries after an antarāla were built connecting garbhagṛha and the maṇḍapa. All the special features of Pallava art, such as lion pillars, maṇḍapa supported by pillars etc. are found in the temple of Kailāsanātha at Kāñchī.

The next phase of building activity in the far south belongs to the reign of the Cholas. Dravidian civilization attained its zenith in the tenth and eleventh centuries during the reign of Rajendra (1018-33 A.D.). The greatest monuments of this age include the temple of Gaṅgaikonda-Cholapuram temple at Tanjor (c. 1025 A.D.)

The vimāna or tall pyramidal tower dominates the whole structure of the shrine with its maṇḍapa, and imparts an extraordinary dignity to it. The structure consists of three parts. The first part of these is the vertical base, 82 ft. square, rising perpendicularly to a height of 50 ft. From this point the pyramidal body of the vimāna rises in thirteen diminishing
stories until it becomes one third of the base, and on the top of this square platform stands the dome. The ornamental decoration of the high tower is of infinitive variety and charm and displays the supremely imaginative quality of the minds that built it. It is unquestionably the first creation of Dravidian art.

Hoysala art:

The Karnataka region of Mysore developed a distinctive style of architecture, known as the Hoysala style (1050-1300 A.D.). The Hoysala builders started building in stone of much finer grain, a kind of greenish or bluish black. There are over a hundred temples of the period in Mysore territory. The minute carving of the Hoysala temple is their most attractive feature, achieving the effect of sandalwood and ivory and ivory-carvings with infinitive variety of ornamental decoration. The figure sculptures are loaded with jewellery and ornaments, head-dresses and pendants. The greatest achievement of the Hoysala art is the temple of Hoysalesvara at Halebid in the Hassan district of Mysore. The exuberance of its sculptural art is said to be one of the most remarkable monuments ever produced by human hand. The wall of the temple is very minutely portrayed with the whole world of Indra’s heaven carved in infinite detail. The temple at Halebid marks the climax of Indian architecture and its most prodigal sculptured magnificence.