A. Architecture:

The art of the age of Harsa need not be considered separately. It is a continuation of the Gupta age and covers the period from the fourth to the eighth century. After the eighth century began the period of decline. Out of the many notable examples of art and architecture of the Gupta age, it is difficult to determine exactly which of them belong to the 7th century A.D. Archaeological remains provide us very little direct evidence. However, the references of contemporary authorities like Bana and Hiuen Tsang indicate that architecture, painting and other fine arts reached their zenith during this period. They built spacious palaces and temples with exquisite carvings and decorated by human and animal figures. The Buddhist monasteries were constructed with extraordinary skill, and the insides of doors, windows and walls were extensively painted. Floral designs seem to have become very popular. Bana has frequent references to dancing, drama, music and other fine arts.

As contemporary evidences say little about the caves excavated during the period under review, it is difficult to...
mark out the specimens of the caves carved out during this age. Modern scholars like Goomaswamy, R. D. Banerji, Brown, Percy; V.S. Agrawala and others have opined that most of the caves at Ajantā, Bāgh and Ellora were excavated between 500 to 700 A.D. Many of the caves belong to the Buddhist faith, though Brahmical and Jain excavations are not rare. Out of 28 caves at Ajantā, caves No.19 and No.26 are the Chaitya caves and the rest are viharas (monasteries). The Chaitya caves No.19th and 26th (probably carved out during the 6th century A.D.) are famous for their wealth of figure sculptures. The vihāra caves Nos. 1st and 2nd (probably excavated in the 6th century A.D.) are enriched by paintings depicting contemporary social life.

All the nine viharas caves at Bāgh (excavated slightly later) are plainer and simpler than those at Ajantā. The fundamental difference between the two series is that the halls of viharas at Bāgh generally contain a Chaitya instead of an image of the Buddha, indicating the Hinayāna characteristic of the caves. The most important is the great vihāra locally known as the Rangamahāl (No.4). Its most interesting feature is a highly ornate porch, consisting of a deep entablature, supported on two circular columns. Out of the 12 rock-cut monuments near Aurangābād, only one is a Chaitya cave. The rest are the viharas which can hardly be placed earlier than 7th century A.D. Their architectural design, though copied from the
latest series of Ajantā caves, seems to have grown mechanical and lifeless. But the artists of Aurangābād excelled in figure sculptures which were not only of massive proportions, and distinguished by boldness of relief and almost lifelike effect.  

The Buddhist caves at Ellora, situated at the southern end, imply probably two centuries of activity, approximately between A.D. 550 and 750. Except cave No.V known as the Mahāvāḍa, others differ very little from the monastic caves of Ajantā. Mahāvāḍa is unique in design having no exact parallel in the vast range of cave shrines in India.  

No.10 known as Viśvakarmā is a Čaitya hall; the remaining are vihāras. Out of them Donthāl (No.XI, two storeyed, really speaking three storeyed) and Tin Thāl (No.XII) are noted for their beauties of execution. Fergusson observes that Tin Thāl is the most interesting of its class in the whole of India. The facade rises to a height of nearly 50 feet. Each storey has the rich profusion of sculptures depicting the scenes of religious and social life of the age.

Rock-cut Brahmanical monuments are mostly found at Udayagiri (Bhopāl region), Badāmi (Bijāpura district) and Ellora. Most of the caves at Badāmi and Ellora seem to have been excavated during 6th and 7th centuries.
A.D. Cave No.3 at Badami contains an inscription dated in Saka year 500 (578 A.D.) which helps in determining the date of the other caves. Badami caves are noted for the varied designs of the pillars and different types of sculptures. The Brāhmaṇical caves at Ellora date from about 650 A.D. Out of the 16 Brāhmaṇical caves, the Daśāvatāra (No.15), the Dumarlena (No.29) and the most well-known Kailasa (No.16) are very interesting for their designs and decorations. The Brāhmaṇical cave in the island of Elephanta near Bombay possibly belongs to this period. The three faced image of Śiva as Maheśa is justly described as one of the finest specimen of sculptures in the whole of India. The cave temple of Jogeshvara in the island of Sālsatāte, being of much inferior execution, may be considered to be the latest example of Brāhmaṇical cave-architecture which was then becoming out of date.

The number of Jain caves excavated during the age is very small. One cave at Badami and another at Aihole appear to date from about the middle of 7th century A.D. The most remarkable group of Jain caves, are to be found at Ellora. Though usually regarded as belonging to not earlier than 800 A.D. They may be of the earlier period. If so, they are the most notable monuments of the period, especially because the Jain caves at Ellora are practically the swan song of Indian
Hiuen Tsang mentions that monasteries and stupas of different dimensions were found in most parts of the country. Exquisite carving and painting were common. There were stone and metal images of the Buddhas and the Bodhisatvas. But we cannot say with certainty which of them belong to the time of Harsha. Hiuen Tsang informs us that when he visited Nalanda, he saw a bronze monastery being constructed by king Siladitya (Harsha). When complete, it was to be 100 feet in length. It was probably built of stone and covered with bronze. To the east of this bronze temple about 200 paces, there was a copper image of the standing Buddha more than 80 feet high in a six storeyed building, made by the king Purnavarman in the beginning of the 7th century A.D.

Hwuilli, the biographer of Hiuen Tsang relates that Nalanda was a vast establishment surrounded by a brick wall. There were eight big halls with towers of impressive height. The monasteries of monks were usually four storeyed buildings. The buildings were supported by big pillars which were frequently carved and painted. The ceilings were also adorned with various figures, carved or painted. The
main temple was more than 300 feet high. Its tower
resembled the tower of the Maha-bodhi temple at Bodh-gaya.25

The Gupta age saw great creativity in
temple building. In the fact of

b. Temple architecture: conflicting opinions, it is
difficult to state which of
the temples were built during 7th century A.D. But
scholars like Coomaraswamy and R. D. Banerji assign
some of the temples to the age of Harsha.26 They can
be divided into two broad divisions (i) flat-roofed temples,
and (ii) temples with shikhara. The specimen types of
the flat-roofed temples possibly belonging to this age
are (i) The Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara27
(Bundelakhanda) and (ii) The Jain temple of Meguti at
Aihole (Deccan).28 The flat-roofed type consists of a
flat-roofed square sanctum inside a similar-roofed
cloister. In plan, therefore, the sanctum (garbhagriha)
is a smaller square within a larger square (Mandapa).
Between these two ran the path of circumambulation
(Pradeśākṣa). These temples were mainly modelled on the
Buddhist chaityagrihas, usually built of brick or stone. The
whole structure was mostly supported by square or round
pillars sometimes decorated with human forms or floral
designs. They had no shikhara over the sanctum.29

The temples are all alike with occasional

Parvati Temple and the Jain Temple.

variations. Such one variation
is the provision of an upper
storey above the garbhagriha in
the Parvati temple at Nachna Kuthara which is quite simple in design and decoration. The facade bears carvings in imitation of the Buddhist chaitya halls and the outer walls are decorated by a few sculptures of early Gupta workmanship. The Jain temple of Meguti at Aihole erected by Ravikirti in 634 A.D. during the reign of king Pulakesin II, though in ruins still retains traces of its plan and other arrangements. The exterior walls are decorated by narrow pilasters with little bracket capitals, the intervening space being filled with sculptures. The plan is well balanced structurally. It is a rectangular building.

This type is an elaboration of the first group from which it does not differ in general plan. But its importance lies in the innovation of a sikhara or tower over the sanctum. According to epigraphic evidences no sikhara temple can probably be placed earlier than the 6th century A.D. The best specimens of the type are (i) The Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh (Jhānsi District)
(ii) The Brick temple at Bhitargaon (Kānpura district) (iii) The great Mahābodhi temple at Bodh-gaya (iv) The Mahādeva temple at Nachna Kuthara (7th century A.D.) (v) The brick temple of Lakshmana at Sirpur (Rāipur district 7th century A.D.) and (vi) The Mundeśvari temple near Bhabuā in the Shāhbad district (635-36 A.D.)
In almost all the above cited examples except that of the Mahābodhi temple which has been restored and renovated several times, the Śikhara is either badly damaged or completely destroyed. However, the remains suggest a straight edged pyramidal form very much like the present Mahābodhi Temple at Bodh-gaya. The straight contour of the tower, however, gradually gives place to a slight inward curvature towards the top, as it is found in the Mahādeva temple at Nachnā Kuthāra and the brick temple of Lakṣhmanā at Sirpur. The latter is perhaps the perfect specimen of this type.39

The pillars in temples and vihāras of the period are crowned with elaborate corbels flowered into the charming bowl-shaped 'vase and flower' capitals (pūṃja kalaśa) adorned with their circular garland of flowers looped half way from their tops.40 This type of capital represents the post Gupta tradition in Indian art and constitutes one of the most attractive designs in the whole range of Indian temple architecture.41 The excavations of the Daśavatāra temple reveal large pillars with 'the vase and flower' capitals.42 Later on in the temple of Mundeśvari this design becomes manifest in the shape of semi-circular garlands, each of which has in the centre three flowers, while a string of flowers is hanging between two such garlands.43
The brick temple of Lakshmmana at Sirpur (Raipur district)
The Pārvatī temple at Nachnā Kutharā (Bundelkhand).
The Mahābodhi temple at Bodh-gaya.
The Mahābodhi temple described by Hiuen Tsang is perhaps the most typical specimen of the temple architecture of the age. The temple was about 160 feet high with the base of about 20 paces. It was made of bricks and coated with lime. It had tiers of niches with gold images. Its four walls were adorned with exquisite carvings of pearl strings and genii. On the roof was a gilt copper amalaka. There were three lofty halls one behind another on the east side. The woodwork in these were adorned with gold and silver carvings and studded with precious stones of various colours. An open passage through them communicated with the inner chamber. On the left side of the outside door of these halls was an image of Avalokiteśvara and on the right side that of Maitreya, both made of silver and more than 10 feet high. The dimensions and general form of the temple as given by Hiuen Tsang, practically correspond to those of the present temple. We may assume that the temple in its present shape and essential features existed in the 7th century A.D.

According to Bāna the royal palace was an extensive establishment well planned and usually divided into several parts each separated by a courtyard or a square. The most important divisions
were (i) Skandhāvāra (the outer portion of the palace) (ii) Rājakula (the middle part) and (iii) Dhavalagrīha (inner portion - the residence of the royal family). Anybody could come freely to the Skandhāvāra through a grand palace gate. Feudal lords, ambassadors and common people occupied distinct camps. There were separate places for housing the elephants (Gajaśālā) and horses (Mandurā). The Skandhāvāra itself was a vast area.

The Royal gate with a big courtyard separated Rājakula from Skandhāvāra. (ii) Rājakula: It had several divisions - consisting of a swimming pool, a gymnasium, a playground, a park, a guest house, a temple, a kamalavana, a dining hall, stables for the most favourite elephants and selected horses of high breed etc.

It was the inner most part of the palace where the king and the queen usually resided. Its upper storey was called Candrasālikā the structure of which was supported by big pillars having Shalabhanjikā being carved on them. Rājakula and Dhavalagrīha contained separate apartments called Śrimandapa for the princes and the princesses. They included Dhārāgrīha (bath-chambers), lotus gardens, music school, citra-sālā, playground etc.
B. SCULPTURE

No dated sculpture of the 7th century A.D. is so far discovered, but quite a number of them can be assigned to this age. Some specimens at Sārnāth and Nālandā can safely be assigned to this period. They are good specimens of the Gupta spiritual conception of plastic art. Some of the idols of Buddha and of Hindu gods and goddesses (made of stone, metal or clay and placed in temples and monasteries) may be assigned to this age. Pūrṇavarman, the king of Magadha, had placed a 80 foot copper image of the standing Buddha in a six-storeyed building at Nālandā in the beginning of the 7th century A.D.

C. PAINTING:

The art of painting developed its secular character during this age. Human forms, animals, birds and natural scenes were depicted in various colours with different types of pencils and brushes. This art became more popular rather than the stone sculpture whose themes were abstract and spiritual. Bāṇa refers to private as well as public picture-houses (citrasālās). He mentions a city full of picture galleries containing pictures of gods, demons, Siddhas, Gāndharvas and Snakes, which were adorned by many coloured birds.
and foliage decorations. On the occasion of the marriage of Rājyaśrī, a group of skilled painters painted auspicious scenes. While Yaśomati was asleep during her pregnancy, the chowrie bearers on the painted walls seem to fan her. Vassal kings were painted on the palace walls. Contemporary literature suggests that the art of painting was considered as an essential social accomplishment for both the high and the low. The art was called Ālekhana and was widely practised.

The outline was drawn with a pencil called Vartika or with the delicate brush known as a Tulikā. Bāṇa's comparison of it to the romaraji (a streak of hair) of Pundarika, perhaps indicates the use of charcoal power. The painters appear to have been familiar with surfaces, processes, materials and colours for executing a picture and special boxes for keeping different colours and instruments of painting are mentioned. Arāṇā refers to a colour box, picture board and a brush (Grhi-tasamulgaka Citraphalakavartika). Bāṇa also mentions Alabu for preserving colours. Walls, canvas (citrapata) and boards (citraphalaka) were utilised for drawing pictures.
If the frescoes were to be painted, the wall was first white washed and then a mixture of sand and plaster was applied over it. On Rajyasri's wedding, workmen mounted on ladders, with brushes in their hands and plaster pails on their shoulders and whitened the top of the street wall of the palace. Plasterers were covered with showers of sand which fell over them from freshly erected walls. Then followed the actual painting. Painters carried carved boxes of panels for painting with brushes. Some Assamese samples of these boxes were presented to Harska by Bhaskarasvarman through Haamsavega. Separate brushes were required for different colours. The mixing of colours was called Varnasamkara.

Board (citraphalaka) was usually employed in drawing portraits and cloth on canvas, (citrapata) for painting common clay and boards. pictures such as of Yama and Kama.

During Rajyasri's marriage different types of fine cotton and silken cloths, printed and painted, were exhibited and they flashed like thousands of rainbows. Some of them were dyed, others dotted with saffron paste. Corocana pigment was used for painting or printing the swan-borders on the shawls worn by nobles and kings. Painting on clay reached an advanced stage during this period. During Rajyasri's
marriage the wives of Harsa's feudatories, employed their skill in painting to adorn polished cups and collections of unbaked clay-ware. They employed both fingers and delicate brushes.

It is difficult to separate paintings of the 7th century A.D. from those of the paintings of the Gupta age. But some of the paintings at Ajantā belong to this age. The fine painting at Ajantā of Avalokiteswar (cave No. 1) with a blue lotus in his hand probably belongs to this period. Some of the paintings at Bāgh can also be ascribed to this age. Sārangdharā a great sculptor and painter flourished in Mālawā during the 7th century A.D. and was known throughout India.

D. OTHER ARTS:

Like Kālidāsa, Bāna also mentions the auditorium (Prekṣaṇa). It is difficult to have an exact idea of the theatre referred to, but Harsa gives its conventional description in the play 'Priyadarshikā'. It was lovely with golden columns adorned with hundreds of jewels. Plays were generally staged on the occasion of festivals. Kālidāsa's play Mālavikāgnimitra was performed at a spring festival probably in Ujjain. The stage manager introduced the
the theme of the drama to the audience through conversation with an actor. Women too must have taken part in these plays and sometimes they may have worked as directors also. Bāja informs us that Suktikādevī was the manager (Sūtradhārī) of queen Rājyasrī’s plays. Baija casually refers to the audience. Kālidāsa hints that it was composed of learned men. Though nothing is known about the character of the audience, it seems that the king and the nobles and other such eminent persons attended. Therefore the seating arrangements must have been good.

The subjects for the drama were drawn from the epics and from contemporary social life. Amateur theatricals were also common. According to Dandin professional entertainers frequently visited the homes of wealthy persons. Viśrūtaka went to Pracandavarman’s home and presented a Vaudeville programme. It consisted of dance, song, assorted pathos, and the like; hand-waving, foot-flourishing and high kicking; the scorpion wiggle, the crocodile waddle, and the fish twitch. Then he snatched knives from the nearest, disposed them about his person and exhibited certain spectacular and scientific specialties, such as the hawk swoop and the osprey dive. Baṣa also refers to actors and the nature of plays. He records the illustration of Sumitra, the son of Agnimitra, who, was overfond of the drama and was attacked by
Mitradeva at a theatre. Though he does not inform us about the nature of the play, he refers to the actors in the wild miracle-play (arabhati) with its passionate circular dances.

Dancing also seems to have been a popular art of the age. Dancing scenes are depicted on the panels of the temples and in the caves (Ajantā cave No.XVII). Dandin and Bāṇa refer to it and like Kālidāsa, they also refer to different types of dancing. Dances were performed both by female and male artists. On the birth festivities of Harsha harlot-women danced to the accompaniment of instrumental and vocal music. Tambourines were slowly thumped, reeds sweetly piped. Cymbals tinkled, string drums were belaboured, the low gourd lute sang, gently boomed the Kahalas with their brazen sounding boxes, while all the time a subdued clapping proceeded.

In one painting at Ajantā (cave No.XVII) four women are dancing with cymbals in their hands and a male drummer is accompanying them. The poise, the vitality and remarkable proportions of this group are noteworthy. These types of dancing may be a sort of Schalita dance mentioned by Kālidāsa.

The art of dancing was not confined
(ii) Art of Dancing cultivated by high: to women of low class. It was studied and cultivated by the higher classes and even by princesses. Rājyaśrī grew up with friends who were experts in song, dance etc. The princess Kandukavati performed a dance with Kanduka (ball) on the Kanduka Utsava in the temple of Vindhyasāseinīdevī. With wholly faultless grace she crossed her hands and touched the earth with blossom finger tips and then she dropped the ball to the ground and took it from the ground so quickly that she kept its motion timed with her forward or backward steps. This may be called a solo dance popular with maidens. According to Kālidāsa, Dandin and Bana dancing girls must have certain qualities of body as well as of mind. Dandin states that the society of good looking (dancing) girls makes money and virtue worth having. That means genuine manly pride; skill in thought reading; conduct untainted by sordid greed; training in all the social arts; quickness of wit and speech etc. But at the same time Dandin records a proverb, evidently current in his day, 'that gay girls are heartless.' They are reported to have seduced a saint to win a bet.

Both drama and dancing required the help of music. Hiuen Tsang refers to sounding drums and blowing horns.
playing on flutes and harps. Bana to mentions several musical contrivances like the horn or conch (Śankha), drum (dundubhi), tabor (turya), timbrel (renu), lute (viṇā), tamborines (Jhāllariks), reed (vādya), cymbal (tāla), string-drum, lowgourd lute and the horn. When the king went to the bath chamber (snāna-Bhuvana), trumpets sounded and lute, flute, drum, cymbal and tabor resounded in diverse tones. Hiuṣn Tsang confirms this statement by remarking that there is the music of drums and stringed instruments and sng. Bana has called instrumental music as Gandharvasāstra.

The paintings at Aįntā in cave No,XVII also reveal a number of musical instruments including cymbals, drums, lutes with gourds etc.

References in Harsha-carita and Kādambarī indicate that various designs of the artistic development of the age. Display of various dyed and embroidered clothes, on the occasion of Rājyasrī's marriage, indicate the great skill of dyers and embroidery workers. Abhoga umbrella presented by Bhāskaravarman to Harsha, was a wonderful piece of art. It was exceedingly white with garlands of pearls hanging on its sides. A circle of small chowries, made of lotus fibres, was tied round its rim.
On the top was an emblem of a swan with its wings spread. Other memorable presents were drinking vessels embossed by skilful artists, loads of Kardaranga leather bucklers with charming borders, bright gold-leaf work winding about them and rings of hippopotamus ivory, were noteworthy.

Monuments afford little evidence of the condition of art and architecture in the age of Harṣa. But we must remember that the age of Pulakesin the second, the great rival of Harṣa, witnessed great artistic development as evidenced in the fresco paintings of the Ajantā caves. It is during the same period that Narasimha Pallava, the Pallava king, the contemporary of Harṣa, built the great cave temples at Mamallapuram. When such extensive and creative activity was going on in the Deccan and South, Northern India could not lag behind. Hiuen Tsang informs us that Harṣa, Bhāskaravarman and Dhruvasena were great patrons of art and letters. Bāṇa also praises his patron Harṣa as a lover of art. Therefore we may assume that the traditions in art and architecture inherited from the Gupta age continued to flourish in Northern India during this period.
RĀJ-CHHATRA