

INDIAN ART

FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 4

Gandhara, Mathura and Amaravati schools

Centuries around the Common Era



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The centuries around the Common Era
beckoned revolutionary changes
in Indian art and, thus,
to the religious art of
the whole of Buddhist Asia.

With the advent of Mahayana,
the Master came to be worshipped
in the human form.



Till now the Master was only shown symbolically and the symbols were simply motionless. In a break through the Buddha in human form, opened new avenues. Conceiving the Buddha image was itself was a great event in Indian art.



The protuberance of the skull (ushnisha),
the hair-knot, bindi between the eyebrows
and elongated ears were
some of the 32 suspicious bodily signs
identifying him as Mahapurusha



Perhaps this change was part of give-and-take among the Indic religions, and the Gandhara and the Mathura schools heralded this era, influencing each other in a positive way.



Transcending the worshipful image of
the Mahapurasha
was composing scenes from his life
and Jataka stories
helped the visiting devotees
in their religious focus



Adhering to the texts,
composed wonderful episodes
gained far greater doctrinal efficacy,
attained conciseness, and
improved artistic excellence.



Kanishka (127–163 CE) ruled over a vast empire. He patronised all religions. His patronage of Buddhism had a major role in the development of Silk Road.

Kanishka's gold coin

Kanishka's coins portray images of Indian, Greek and Iranian gods



Left: Kanishka standing, clad in coat and boots, flames emanating from shoulders
Legend in Greek "of Kanishka, king of kings".

Right: Standing Buddha, in abhya mudra.
Legend in Greek script: "Boddo", for the Buddha.



Religious and patrons of art,
it was during the Kushan rule,
develped two schools of art:
Gandhara on the West and
Mathura in the Gangedic plains.



But between the two schools
there were variations.

While the former was influenced
by the Greek elements,

Apollo-like in visage, drapery etc
the latter is totally indigenous,
inspired by the Yaksha tradition.

Contemporary literary and oral tradition
played a major role in this



Let us first look at the Gandharan art



Importance

Gandharan art phase is an important period during which time significant changes took place in religious expression


A dynamic foreign influence gradually assimilated into the local idiom adapting to local tastes and ethos, but losing its original identity, a typical Indian characteristic



Spread of Buddhism

*The triumph of Buddhism and
the trade activity between
the Mediterranean
and the Far East
helped the spread of Gandharan art
even to Southern Central Asia*

Origin



*Gandhara art is has a rare combination of
Greek and Indian elements.
But it did not originate in Greek,
but a local evolution
in Afganiastan and the Punjab,
descending from
the art of the Greek of the period,
applied to Indian themes.*

Style



*It was plastically almost altogether Greek,
but only part iconographically.
The drapery, the ornaments and
the compositional techniques
give the needed clue.*

Buddha image

*The Buddha,
seated Buddha in yogic posture or
standing meditating,
hands in various mudras
with prominent ushnisha
are all Indian,
but all completely alien
to the Hellenistic tradition*

Period



*The beginning of this School
could be traced to the first century BCE
and continued till about the 5th century
reaching its peak in the 2nd century CE,
during the reign of Kanishka.*



Base material

*In the earlier phase were used
a metamorphic rock
and grey sandstone , and
later switched over to stucco,
a medium of great plasticity.
The sculptures were originally
painted and gilded.*

Features



Some of the typical features of this school are dress with characteristic folds, ornaments, wavy hair etc.

It also contributed positively through its anatomical accuracy, spatial depth and foreshortening.

The bulky Buddha of the Mathura school became slender and elegant.



*All these led to further classicising of the
Buddha image
in the following Gupta period.*



The poignant moment of Siddharta riding away is dramatised by two *yaksha*-s lifting the hooves to prevent any noise being made.

Ahead are the Mara, the Evil One, and his soldiers urging the prince to abandon his mission.



This is a classical Buddha of the Gandharan school.

The stylized forms, the praying figures on the lotus-flower pedestal, and the slightly stiff drapery are more typical of the period

Bodhisattva, depicted as a moustachioed handsome young man, turbaned, draped in elaborate garments, wearing lots of ornaments round his neck, arms and fingers, and life-like sandals on his feet and with a bright face makes this a divine figure





Royal women in rich clothes are offering flowers to the Buddha.

The truth seeker is shown
at the end of gruesome
penance reduced to
a mere skeleton,
before giving up
the ascetic way as fruitless.

The rendering of
the emaciated body,
though unrealistic,
is extraordinarily effective.





The demonic appearance of Mara's army is an iconographic triumph.

Two princes,
one of whom seems
to be whistling
to other people
to come along
juxtaposed with an
emaciated monk
offering flowers
to the Buddha.

The characteristic
treatment of the eyes
and hair and
in the accuracy of
the details are specific
to this school.

A novel composition .



Miraculous
conception
Miraculous
conception



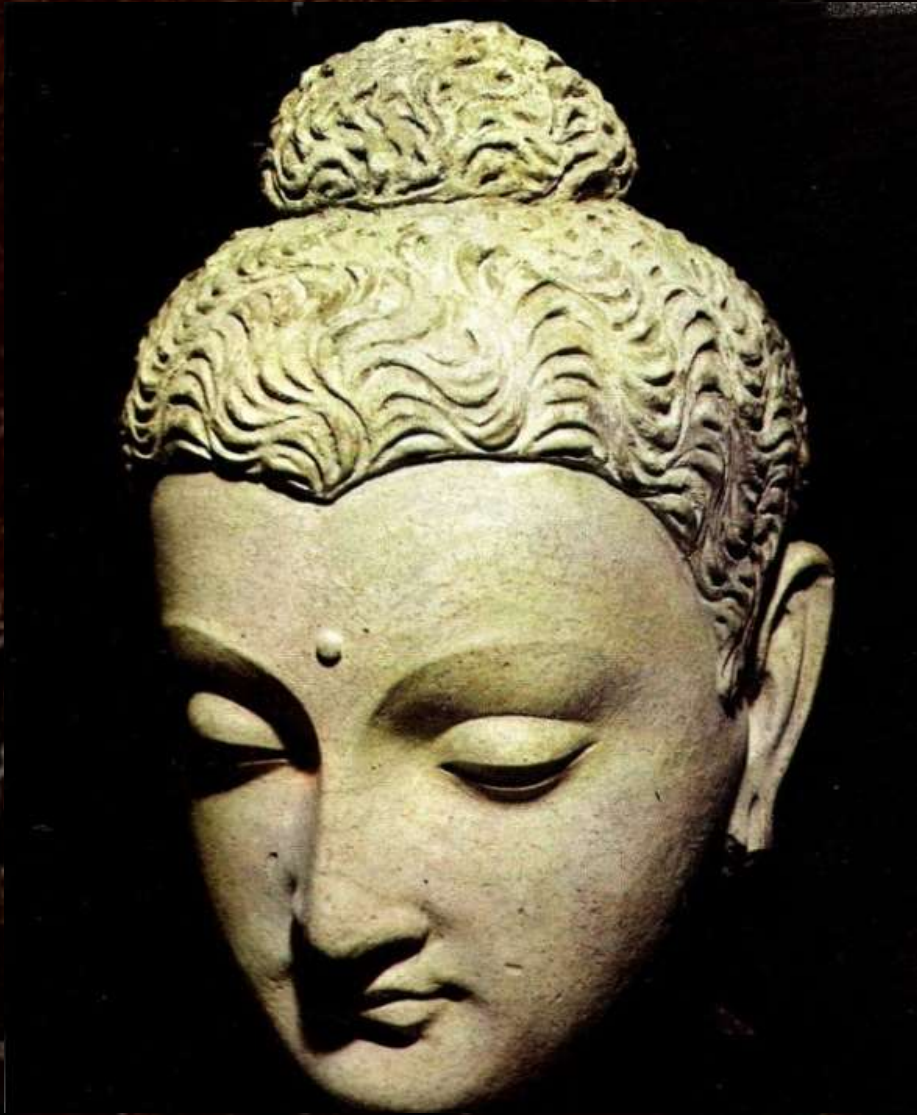
Maya dreaming of an elephant entered her womb through her side.

A maid attends the sleeping mother-to-be.

Bodhisattva with
an elaborate headdress and
typical side-moustaches
with the middle of
the upper lip shaven
is staring into the void.



Miracle with stucco



Head of the Buddha, is extraordinarily pleasing and conveys both the Buddha's serenity and the intimacy of his reflection.

Miracle with terracotta

Head of the Buddha,
a variant of
the preceding figure
with fewer
classical characteristics,
despite the Greek profile.



Miracle with stucco



Head of a Bodhisattva preserves the purity of the classical profile, despite the typical bulging of the eye-balls and treatment of the arched eyebrows.

The crown-shaped turban, though rich, is rendered with great restraint.

Head of
a donor or a *deva*
is an excellent
example of
a classical figure
with the predominant
colours of
gold, black and red.

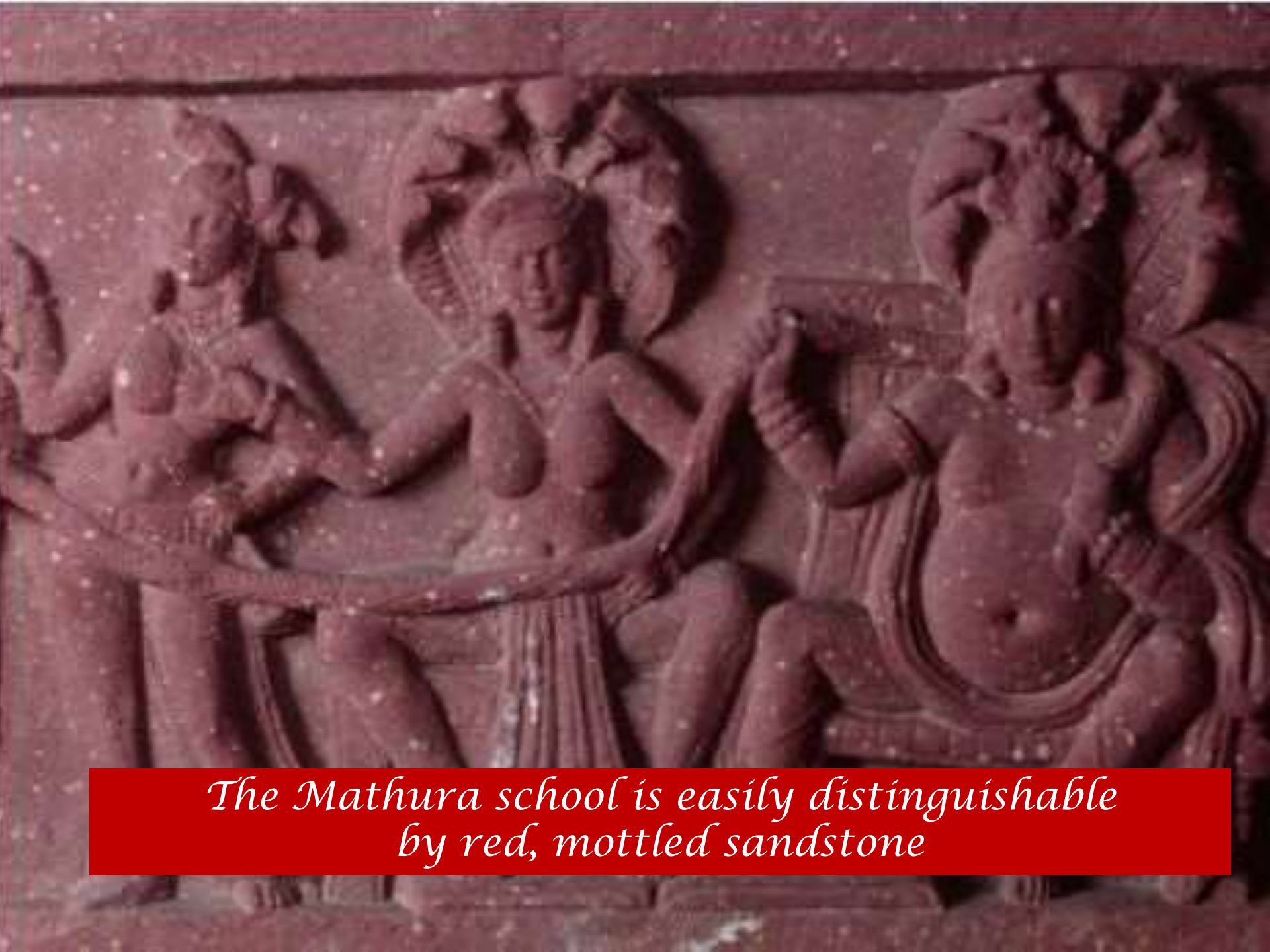




The Gandhara craftsmen made
a lasting contribution
to Buddhist art.



Now we shall go to Mathura



*The Mathura school is easily distinguishable
by red, mottled sandstone*

Importance

*The Mathura school,
is an important mile-stone.
This could be termed as an experimental period
for conceiving divinities,
Buddhist, Hindu and Jaina,
and also portrait studies.*

Buddha and Bodhisattva

*Adopting yaksha to the religious requirement,
a final idiom for image of
the Buddha and of the Bodhisattva
was created.*

Proto-type for divinities

*A typical example is the Buddha
sitting in padmasana on a lion-throne,
under the Bodhi tree,
with his right hand in abhaya mudra,
and the left is placed on the thigh;
eyes wide open
the protuberance on the skull
indicated by a single curl coiled to the left,
hands and feet are marked
with auspicious symbols,
two fly-whisk bearing celestials,
standing on either side,
set the standards for divinities of the future.*

Yakshis as maidens

*Fair maidens, in gracefully flexed postures
engaged in making their toilet
or in dance and music,
or in garden sports and other pastimes,
are masterpieces*

Beginning of Hindu images

*The earliest representation of Hindu gods
is found here.*

*In the earliest Surya images, here and in Amaravati,
are depicted like a king
without lotuses in his hand.*

*Ganesa, more like a baby,
Gajalakshmi, Kartikeya, Sankarshana,
Vasudeva and Ardhanarisvara
are other deities seen during this period.*



Buddha attended
by two Bodhisattvas,
Vajarpani with Vajra
on the left and
Padmapani with lotus
on the right
sitting on a simhasana
with tree-worshipping
devotees



Bhikshu Mala's Bodhisattva,
depicted in
strict frontal position
the association with
similar Mauryan-yaksha
figures.
makes it of Indic origin.

This composition
of Maitreya
combines aspects
of the Buddha and
a Bodhisattva.



Buddha is seated
on a lotus throne



on a simhasana



Buddha has
sharply defined
features
and wavy hair



Gandhara



Mathura

Buddha has
round faces, broad
cheekbones,
wide and
elongated eyes
and curled hair.



A yakshi holds up a jar full of wine, suggesting moon-lit night, and the other hand holds a bunch of green mangoes, suggesting spring.

On the terrace are a couple enjoying each other's company.

The connotations are extremely poetic and charming.

Invariably the yakshi is draped in almost transparent cloth.

. The jewelry is somewhat heavy but elegant: the broad necklace, the heavy earrings, the multiple bracelets, the elaborate girdle and the heavy anklets jingle as the wearer moves



Yakshi represented in the two schools



Mathura



Gandhara



A beautiful courtesan, pursued by an admirer, removes the flowers from her braid and the anklets from her feet, because they betray her by their perfume and jingling in the darkness.

Interestingly, the reverse also has a narration



Drunken courtesan,
helped by a youth
and attended by
a young female attendant
and
an elderly courtesan.

Narration in the reverse

Skanda, a Hindu god,
as Saktidhara
holding the spear

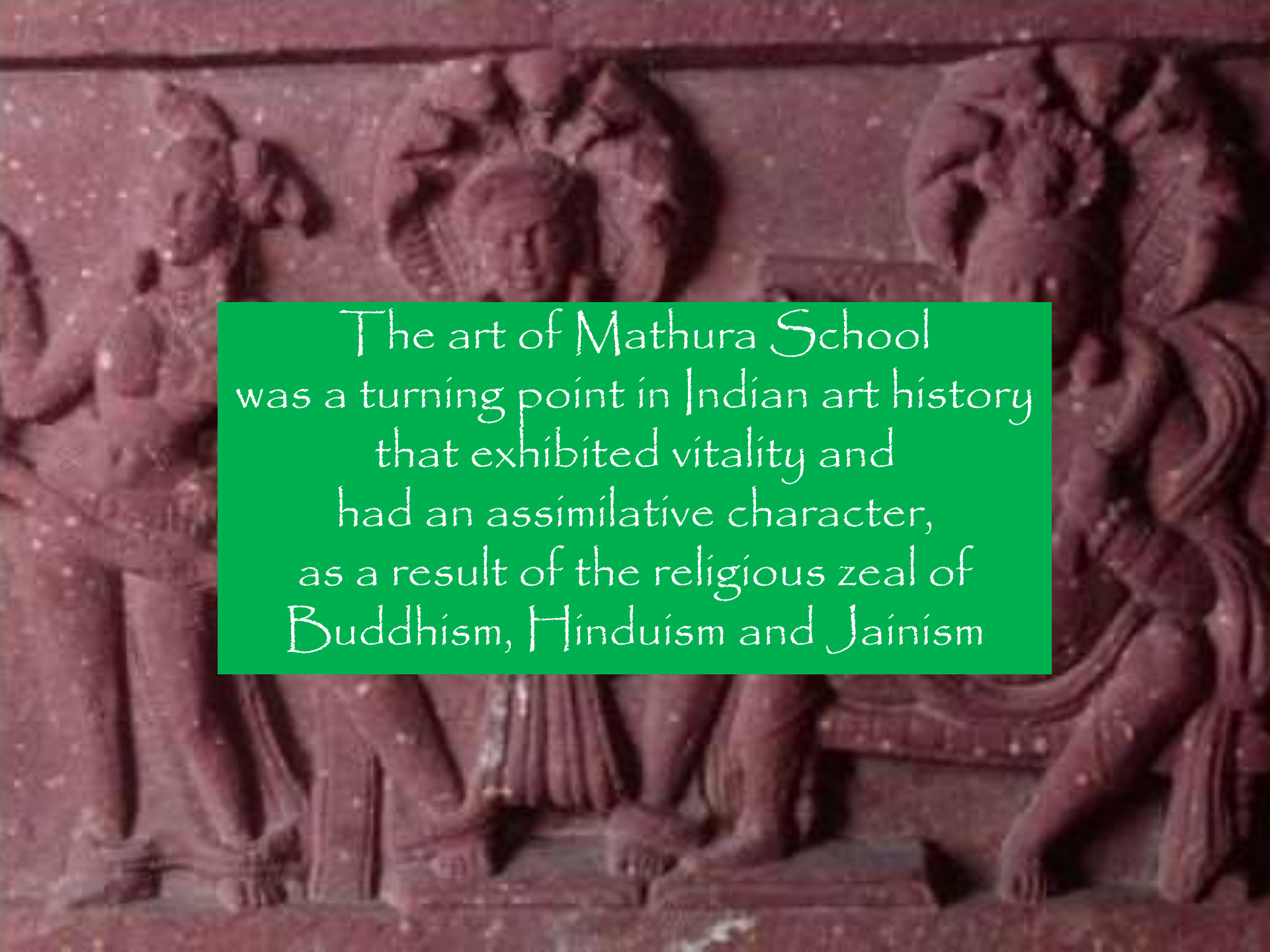




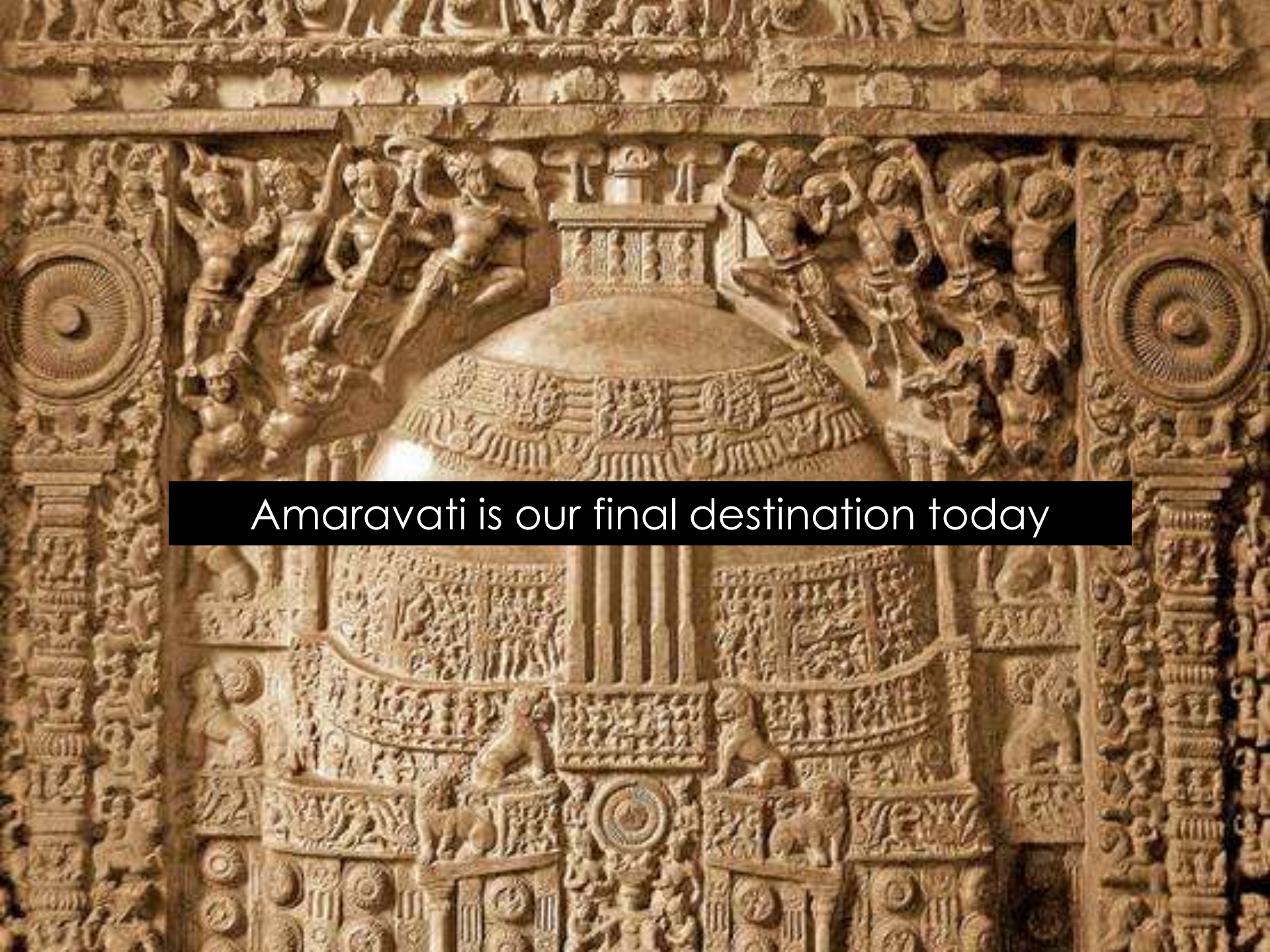
Lord Vishnu



Sarvatobhadra Tirthankara,



The art of Mathura School was a turning point in Indian art history that exhibited vitality and had an assimilative character, as a result of the religious zeal of Buddhism, Hinduism and Jainism



Amaravati is our final destination today

The Satavahanas ruled a most of Deccan during 3rd c. BCE to 3rd c. CE and had contributed significantly to art, literature and culture. It is during this period the earliest caves of Ajanta were excavated, Sanchi stupa was built and the art of Amaravati flowered.





Location & period

*The Amaravati, closer to us,
has produced some of the finest art.
It has a long period, almost 6 centuries,
starting from 2nd century BCE,
patronised by Satavahanas and the Ikshvakus.
Amaravati art is spread over
a few locations close by
like Jaggayyapet, Nagarjunakonda etc.*



Phases

A large stupa, built during the Asoka, had been successively embellished in four identifiable periods, each stage imprinting its own character.

Till the second period ending in 100 CE, the Buddha was not shown in human form



Themes & style

*The story of the Buddha is the main theme,
in which kings, princes, palaces
and human beings as central characters*

*There are influences of the Greeks,
like the curly hair, use of Greek scrolls and
horse-driven Greek chariots*



Its art

*Amaravati art is noteworthy
for many special features:
Variation in depth of relief and
overlapping figures and
use of diagonals suggest depth,
were used with great effect.*



*Varied postures,
crowded, yet unified compositions
filled with dynamic movement and
a keen awareness of dramatic
were the hall mark of this art.*



Features

*Characters lighter than those of
Gandhara and Mathura
long legs, slender frames and curvy and
mobile, even when resting*



First let us see some typical samples



Dynamic movement, a keen awareness of dramatic



Slender characters



Posture create light, joyous effect



Skillful display of representation of scenes of action

Mandhata Jataka



Crowded, yet unified compositions



Mobile, even when resting



Bodhi tree as the Buddha



There are some narrative scenes

Sidharta leaving the palace



Characters are slim-waisted and thin-limbed tending towards Indian idealism, particularly evident in the two female figures, charmingly natural and grace, an advancement over Bharhut and Sanchi.

Interpretation of dream

Mayadevi's Dream

Presentation of Child

Birth of the Buddha

Episodes from the life of the Buddha





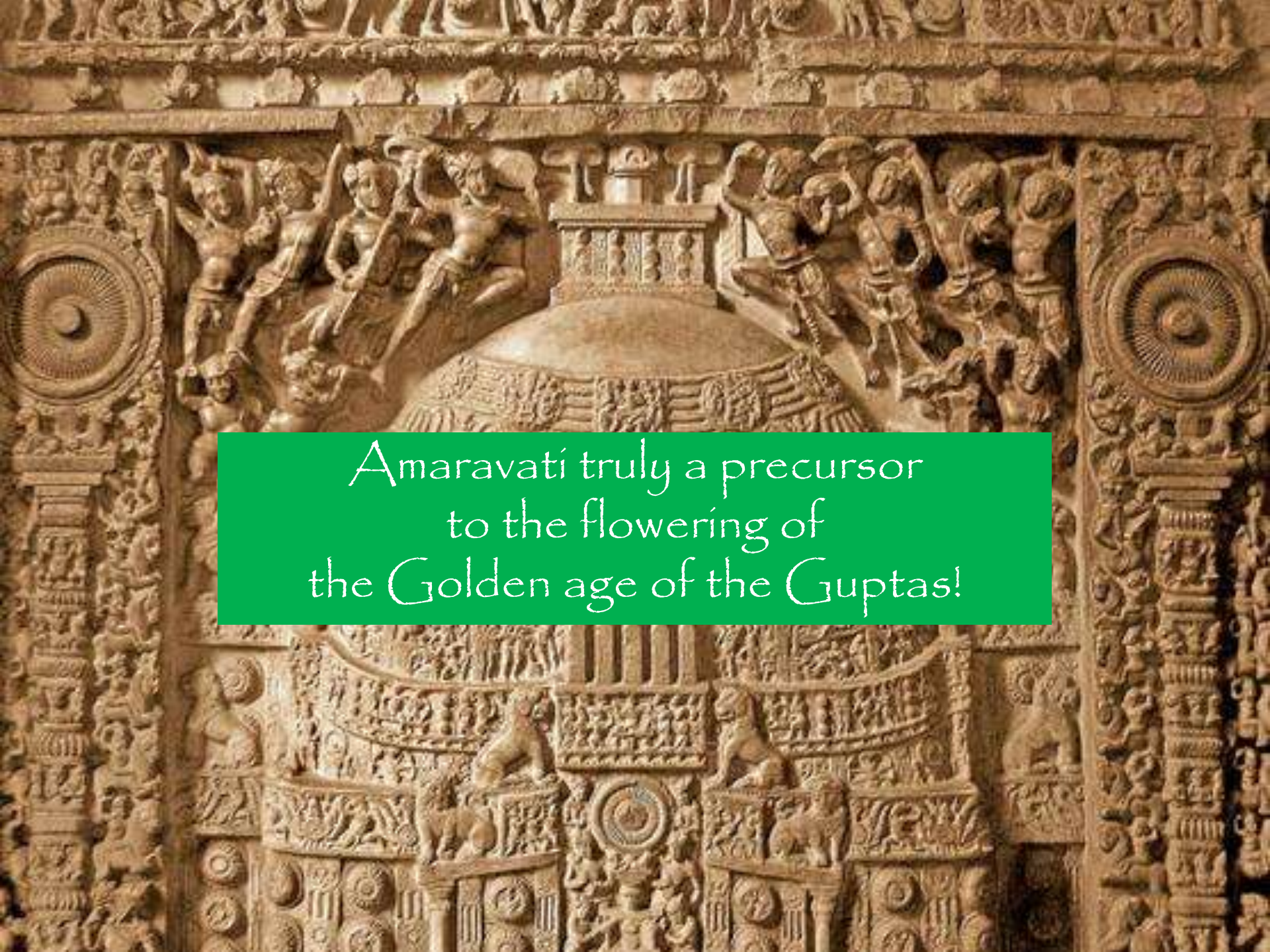
These incidences are separated from each other by architectural forms.

The characters appear in lively poses and are deeply carved and harmonised.

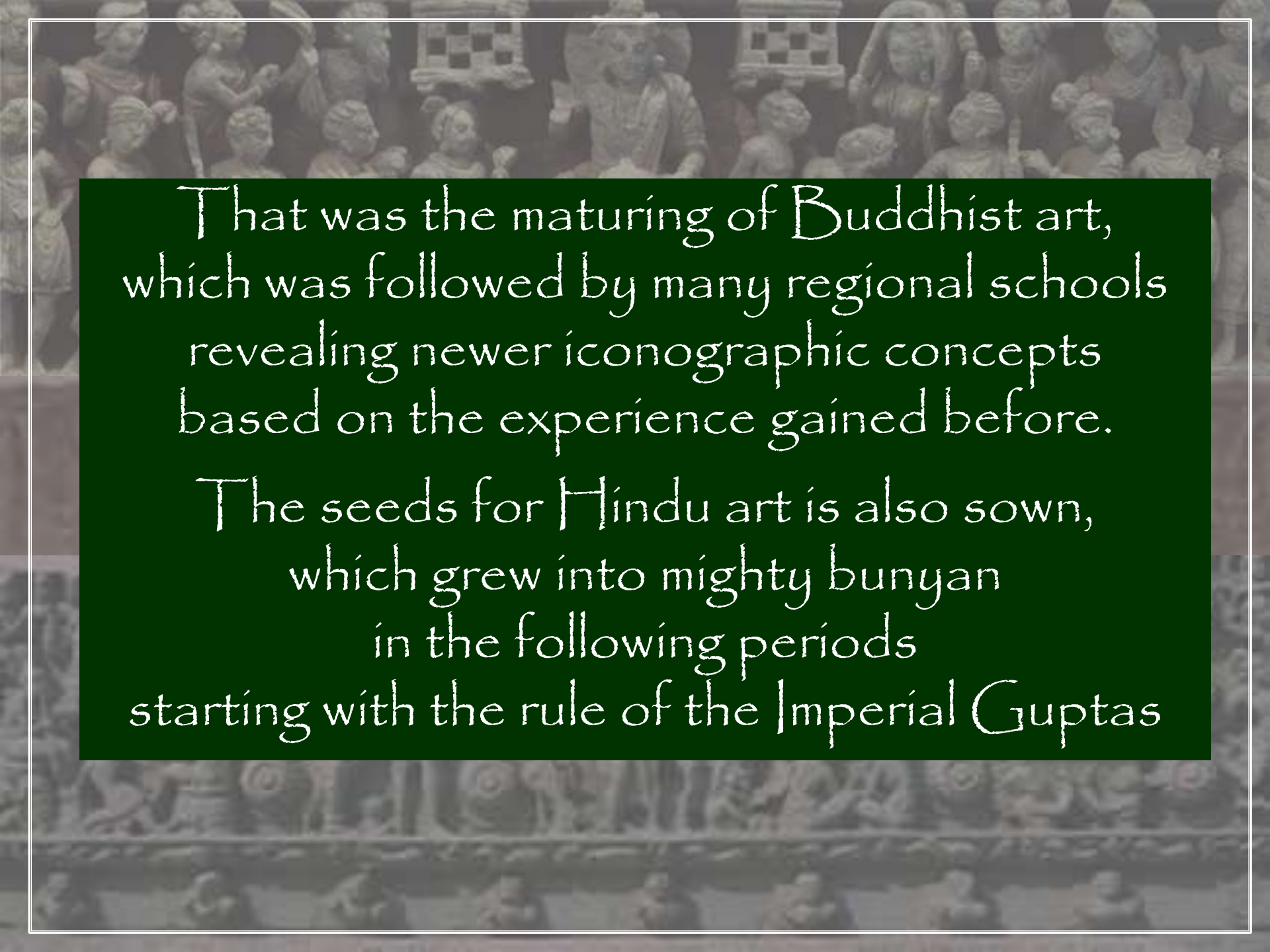
This division will be met with juxtaposing diverse scenes again in Ajanta.



Subjugation of Nalagiri, a master piece

The image shows a highly detailed stone relief carving, likely from the Amaravati region. The central focus is a large, dome-shaped structure, possibly a stupa or a ceremonial platform, which is surrounded by a group of figures in various poses, some appearing to be dancing or performing a ritual. The entire scene is framed by a wide, ornate border filled with intricate carvings, including circular motifs and smaller figures. The overall style is characteristic of the Satavahana period, known for its fine and realistic art.

Amaravati truly a precursor
to the flowering of
the Golden age of the Guptas!



That was the maturing of Buddhist art, which was followed by many regional schools revealing newer iconographic concepts based on the experience gained before.

The seeds for Hindu art is also sown, which grew into mighty banyan in the following periods starting with the rule of the Imperial Guptas