

# INDIAN ART

## FROM INDUS VALLEY TO INDIA TODAY

Talk 5

Golden age of the Guptas

4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> century CE



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## Background

The Art of India up to the fourth century CE was purely eclectic and transitional.

The spirit of Indian thought, an inheritance of indigenous, Early Asiatic, Persian and Gandhara elements, was struggling to find definite artistic expression in sculpture and in painting.

It was during the Gupta period the form of expression was artistically perfected, and became national.

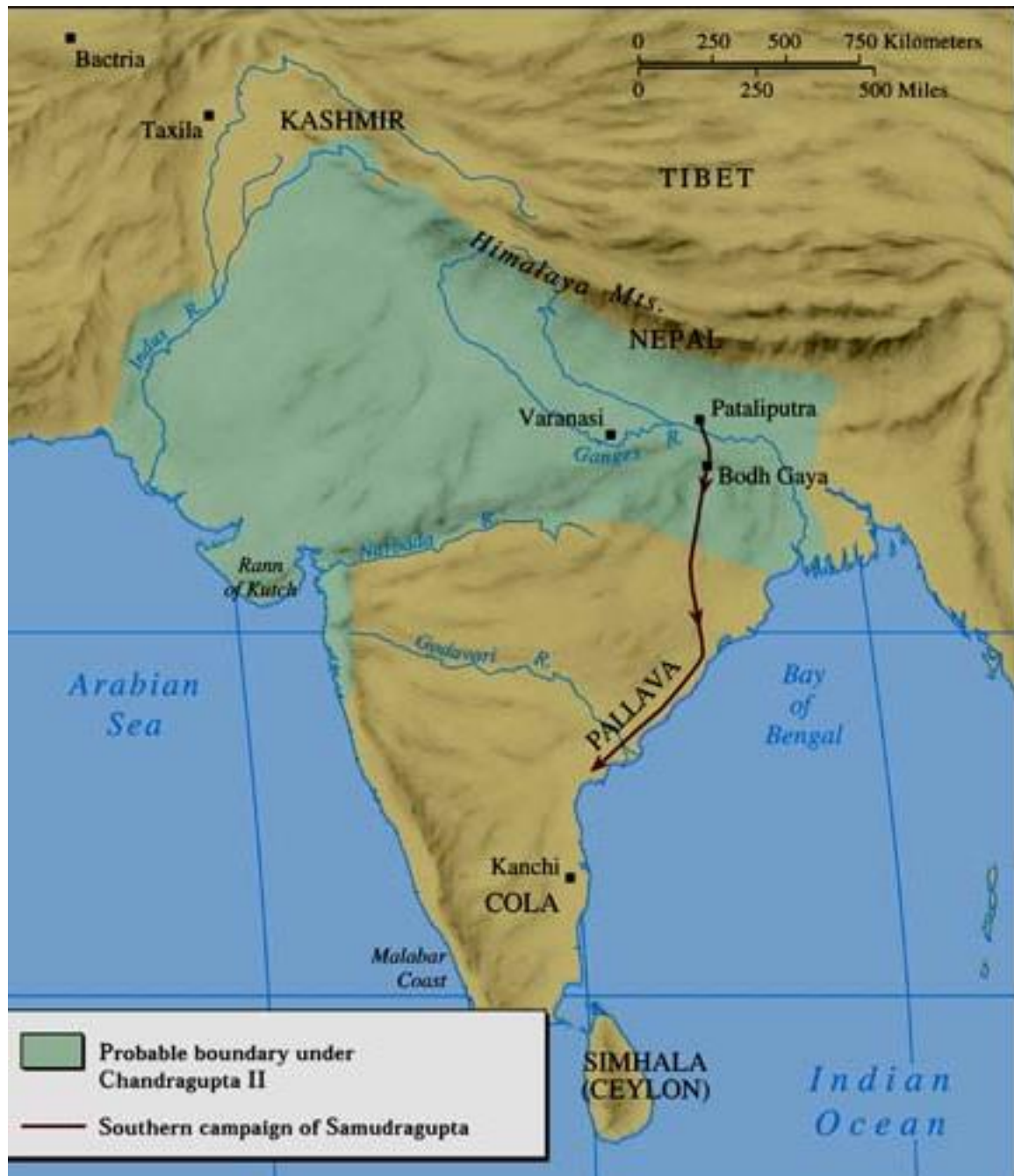


## Golden age

The Gupta period can be taken as 320-600.

In fact if one takes only the period  
from the ascension of Chandragupta I (319 CE)  
till the defeat of Skandagupta (480 CE)  
it is even much shorter.

But what has been achieved during this period  
invites the term the Golden Age,  
and it richly deserves.





During this Golden Period were promoted  
science, art, philosophy etc

The Navartna (Nine Jewels)  
produced advancements in many fields

Sanskrit literature reached a peak with  
Kalidasa, Vatsyayana etc



Scientific advancement was made through  
Varahamihira, Aryabhata etc

The famous decimal numeral system  
was created during this period

Sushruta Samhita was written

The game of chess originated from this period

..... and many more



The cultural creativity during this period produced magnificent architecture, sculptures, and paintings, which would be our focus now



## Significance

The promise of the earlier schools was now fully realized, and, at the same time, new forms and artistic ideals were formulated to be followed in succeeding centuries.

From sheer sensuality, the form drastically transformed to conforming to the religious vision; the sensual and the spiritual unified and inextricably blended.

The forms became refined and treated with sure and unsurpassed elegance, and acquires delicacy and repose, never met with before..





As can be seen on the image of the Buddha,  
instead of the early the edificatory,  
didactic Buddha  
he becomes meditative  
The repose in the Master exudes  
an inner contemplative visage

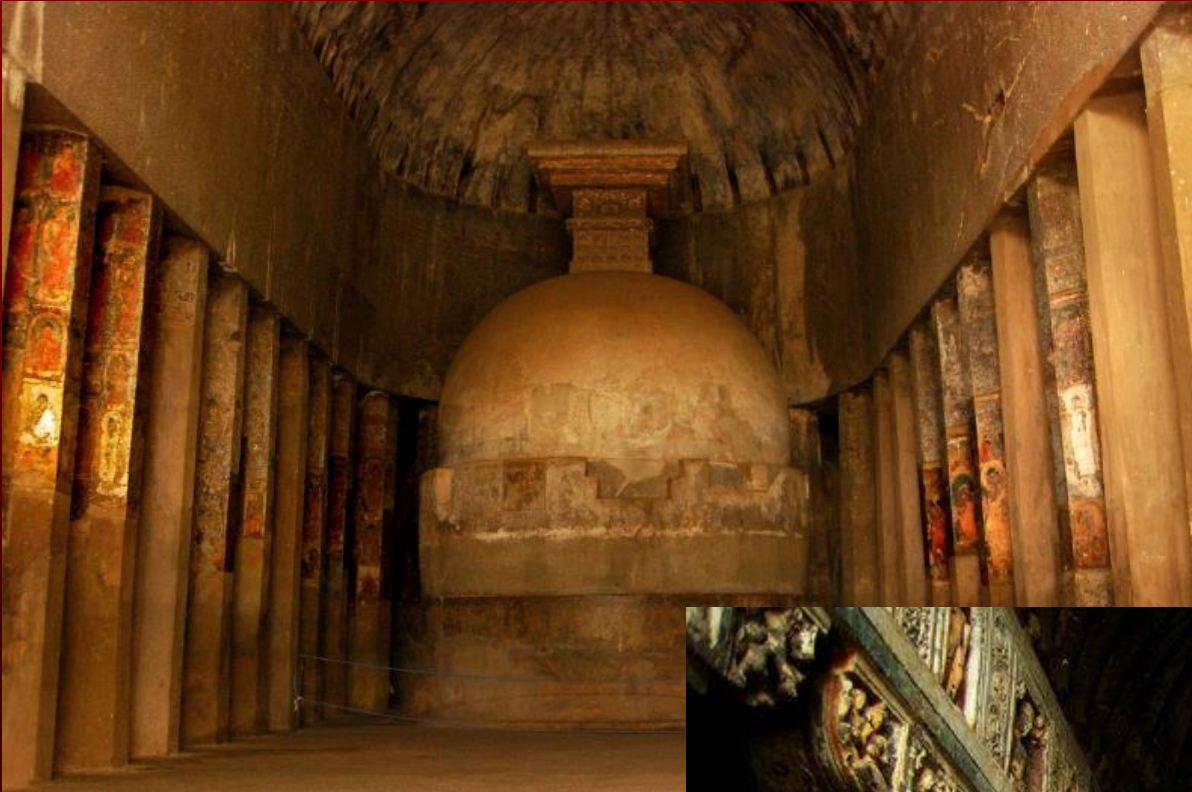


Decorative element became unobtrusive and  
was in perfect harmony with the object it adorns.  
Thus, the period perfected a language to express  
without conscious effort  
This fragrance travelled all over the country and  
to the South-East.

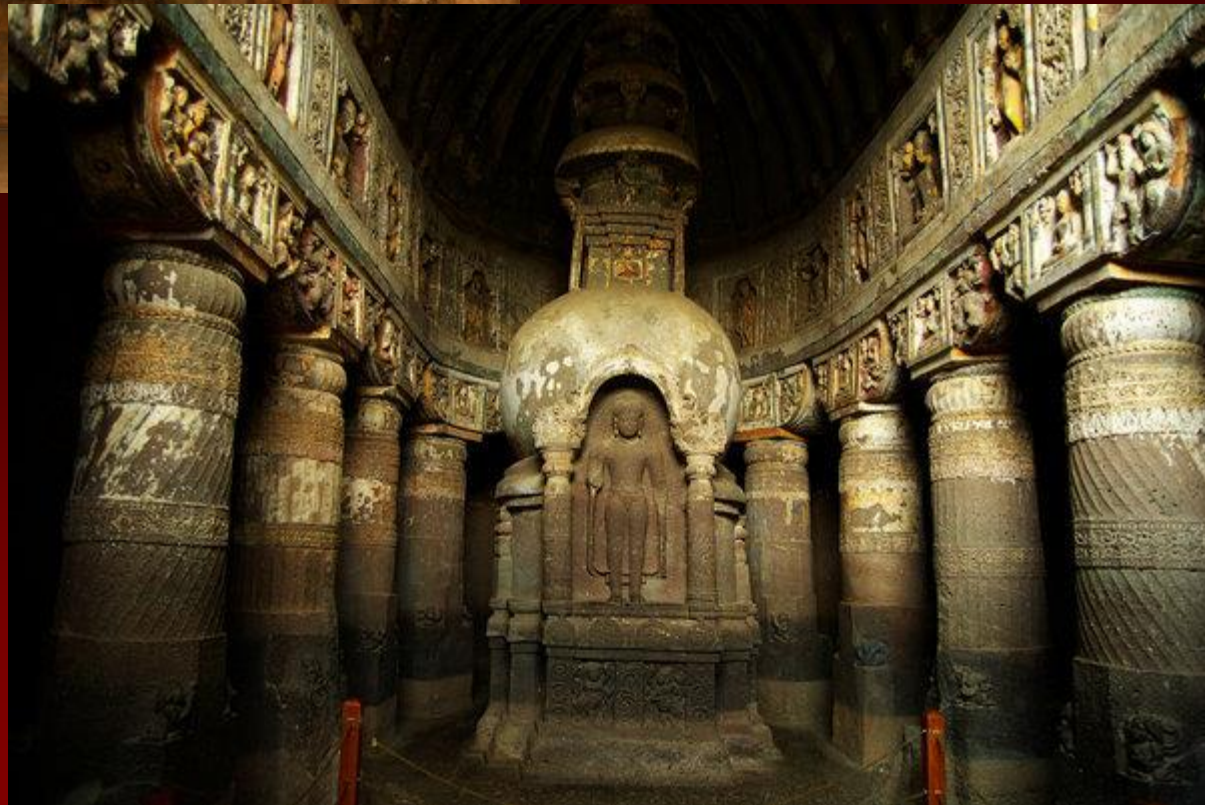
We may touch upon  
the accomplishments  
in the field of architecture  
before going in detail about  
art of sculpture

Chaityas, the Buddhist worshipping places,  
which were being excavated from the 2<sup>nd</sup> BCE,  
and  
also depicted in reliefs  
provided inspiration and blueprint  
for structural temples

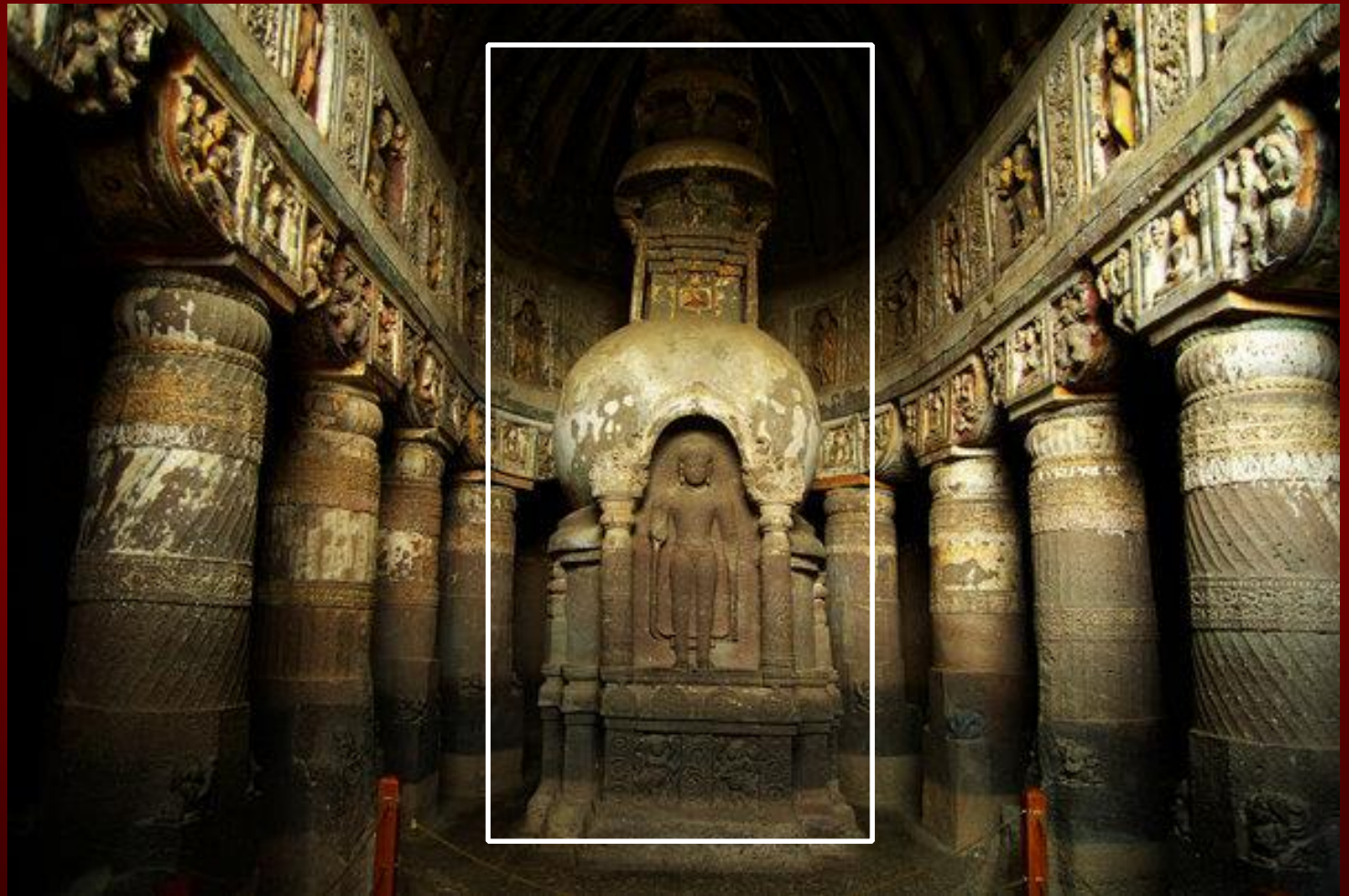
Pre-Gupta Ajanta  
Cave 10 (2-1 cent. BCE)



Gupta Ajanta  
Cave 19 (5 cent. CE)



A high cylindrical drum,  
with standing or seated Buddha between pilasters  
crowned by a *makara-arch*, richly ornamented and  
supporting a globular *aNDa* with *harmika* and *chatravali*



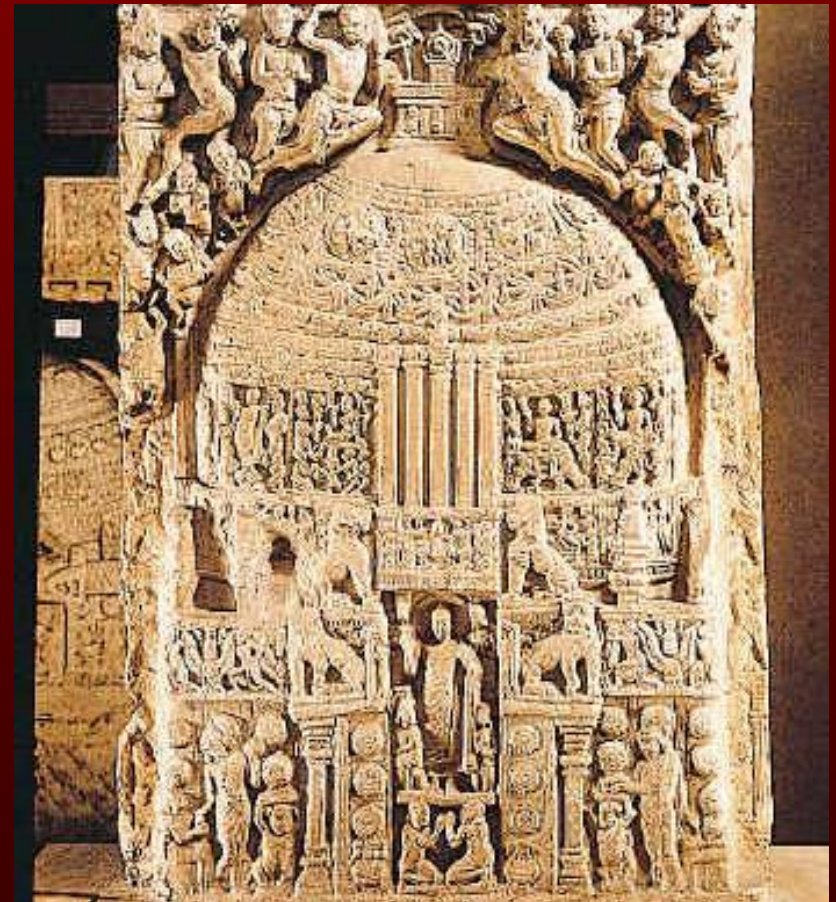
Stupa

We have prototype for Chaityas sculptures in relief earlier



Chaitya in the Gandhara school

Chaitya shown in Amaravati

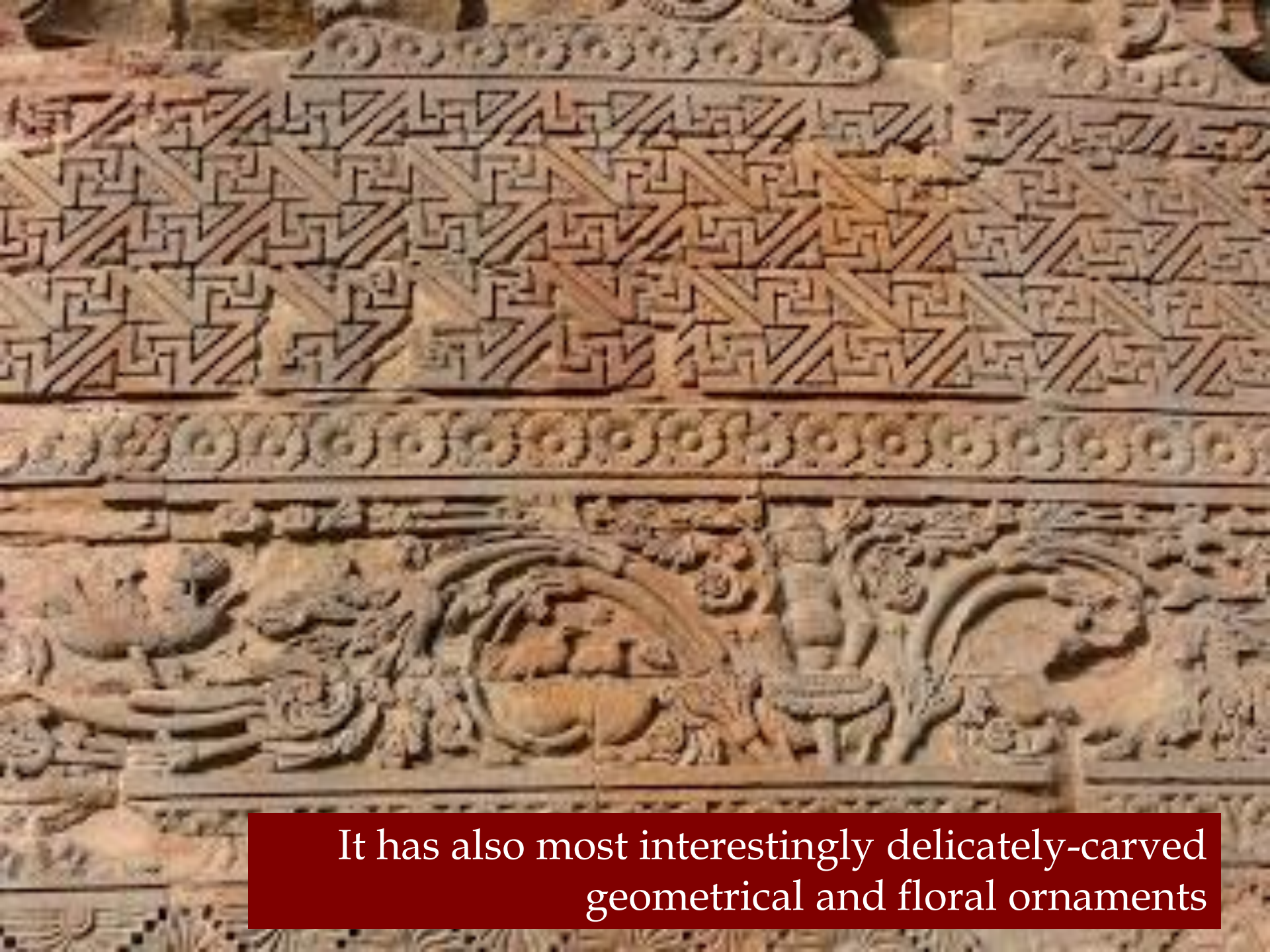


Marking the location of the Deer Park where the Enlightened One gave his first sermon this, a massive (125 ft dia-85 ft high) brick-stone structure, with niches for images of the Buddha



Dhamekh stupa, Sarnath





It has also most interestingly delicately-carved geometrical and floral ornaments



Intriguingly, these geometrical patterns are rarely met with in Buddhist, Hindu and Jaina architecture

# Structural apsidal temples

Chaityas were built modelled after the excavated ones, lead to Buddhist and Hindu apsidal (*gaja-prishtha*) temples



Buddhist temple at Tagar (Maharashtra) later converted as a Vaishnava shrine.

Hindu temples were also built both with flat roof and with *shikhara*.

# Temple for Kankali Devi, Tígawa (MP)



The fifth century Gupta temple is a flat-roofed shrine.  
Let us see some details

Ganga and Yamuna  
are shown plucking  
a fruit from a tree  
as entrance guardians.





The pillars on the portico have been carefully and tastefully articulated: square at base, followed by octagonal and then sixteen sides shaft and then circular at last, is topped by a beautiful *purna-kalasha*, above which is a square abacus with two lions on each face, seated side by side and a tree in between.

# The Gupta temple in Sanchi (MP)





*shikhara type of vimana*



It is built out of  
stone and brick

Deogarh (UP)



The doorway is beautifully carved



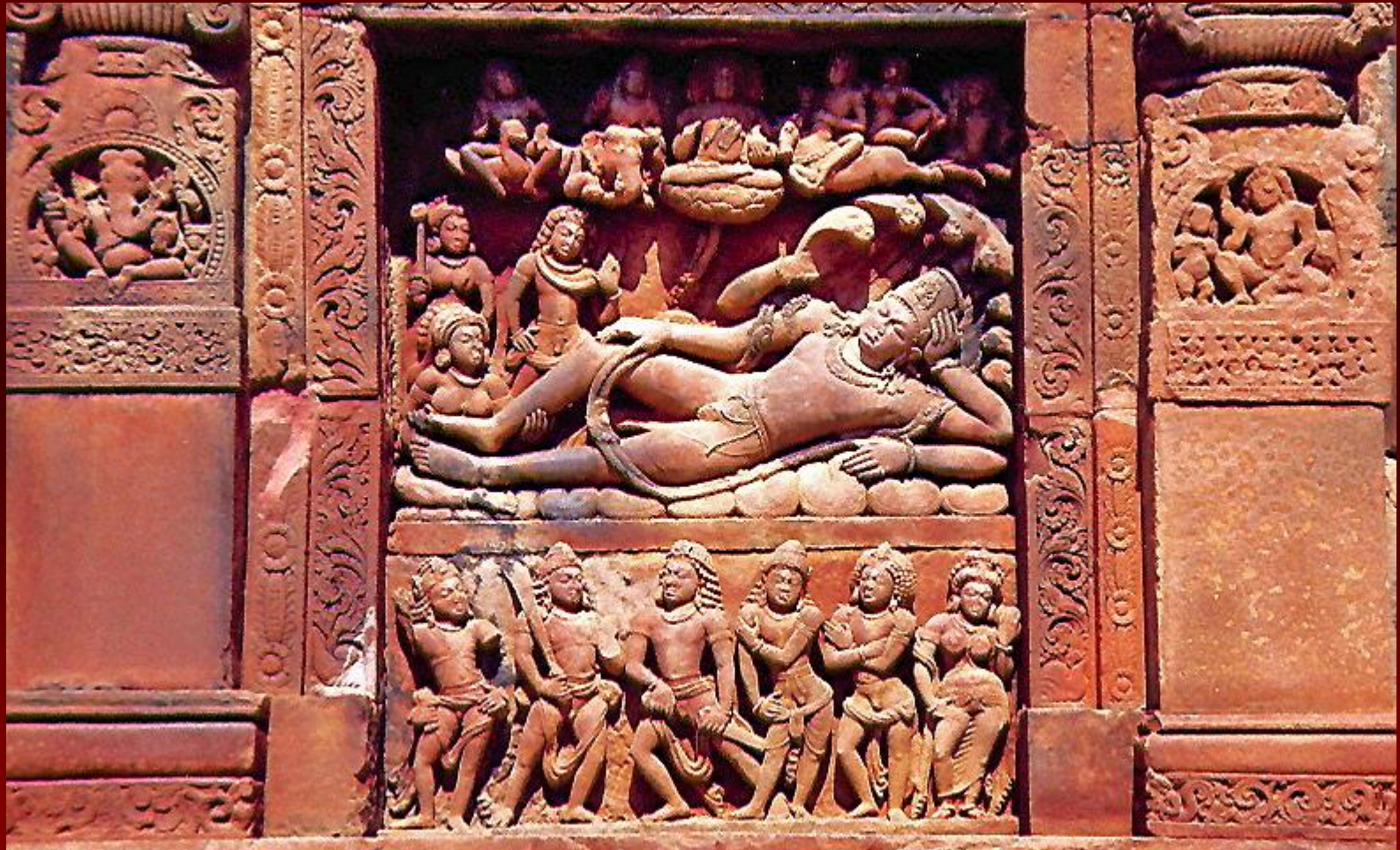
Vishnu sitting majestically  
on a coiled Ananta,  
Lakshmi caressing his foot  
and flanked by  
Narasimha and Vamana

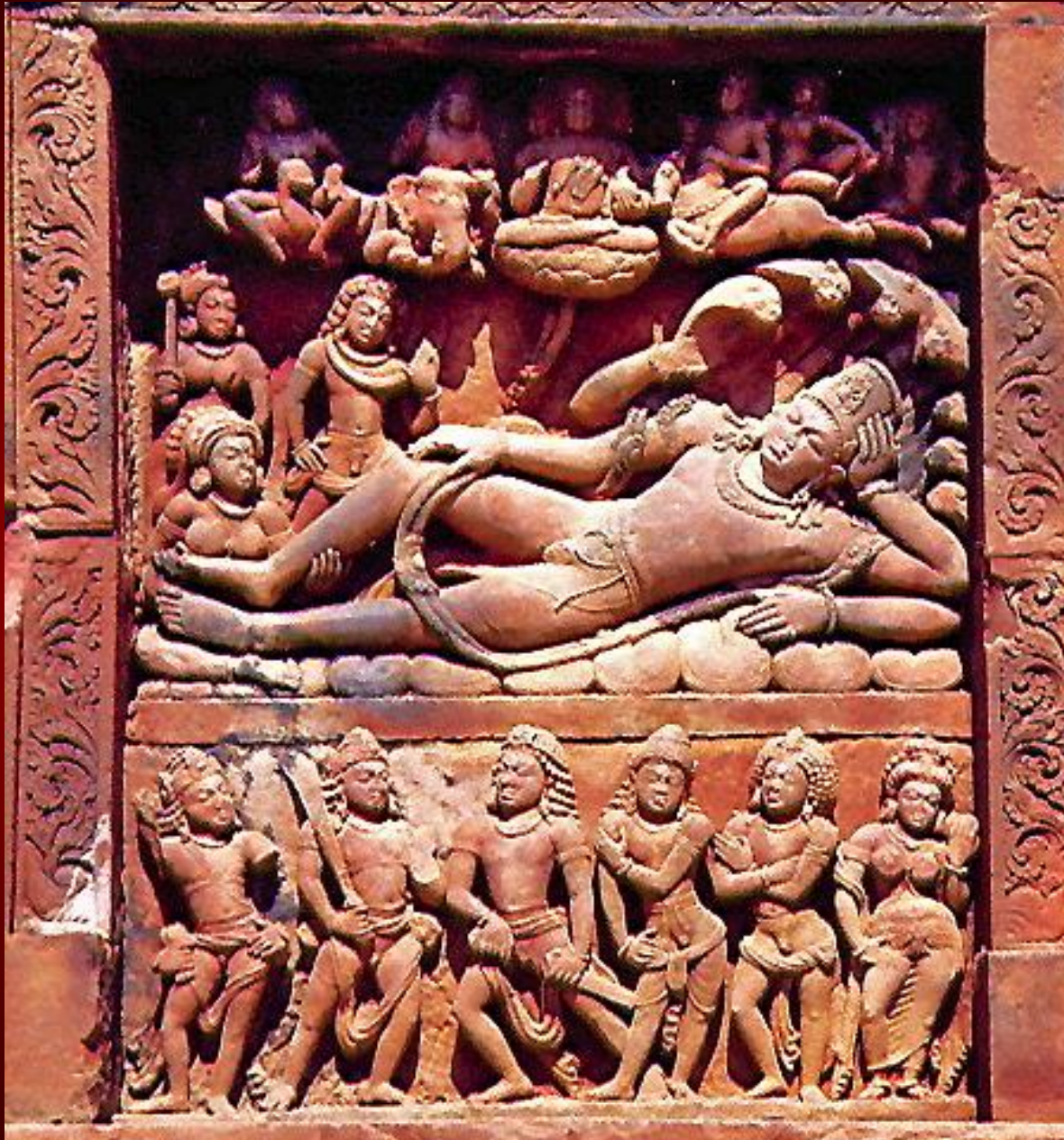
On each outer wall is sculpted Vishnu's various manifestation



The compositions tend to be dramatic; the carving and decoration, sumptuous, the sturdy forms recalling Mathura rather than the attenuated grace of Sarnath.

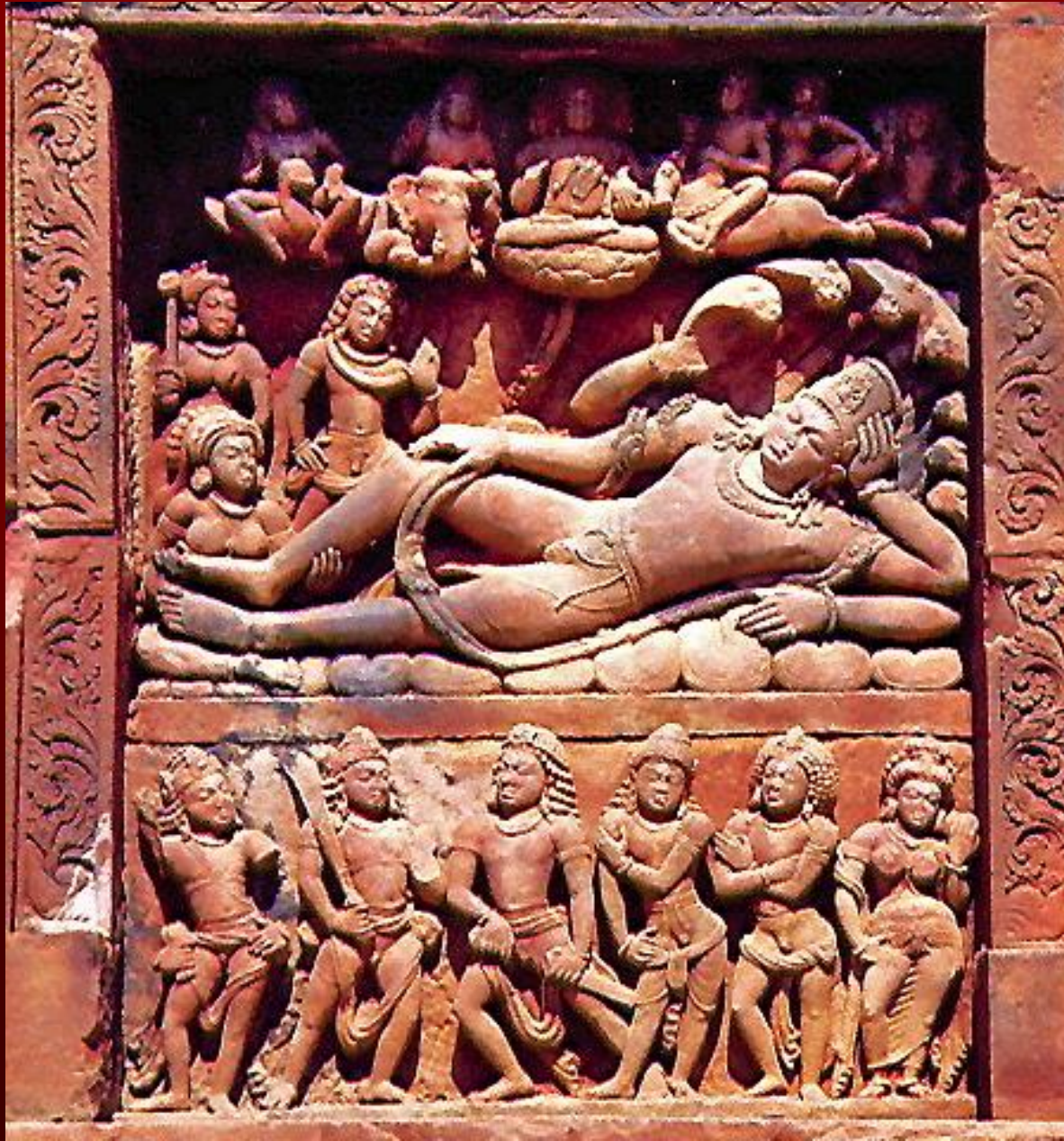
Heralding a totally new concept in composition, the large Anantasayana sculpture is the forerunner for multitudes all over India and abroad.





A four-armed Vishnu is lying calmly on Ananta with its seven hoods forming a shade over his head.

Devi and her attendants are at his feet, while Karthikeya, Indra, Brahma and Siva-Parvati on their mount watch the spectacle



The animated figures below may be Madhu-Katbha being repulsed by Vishnu's *ayudha purusha*-s.

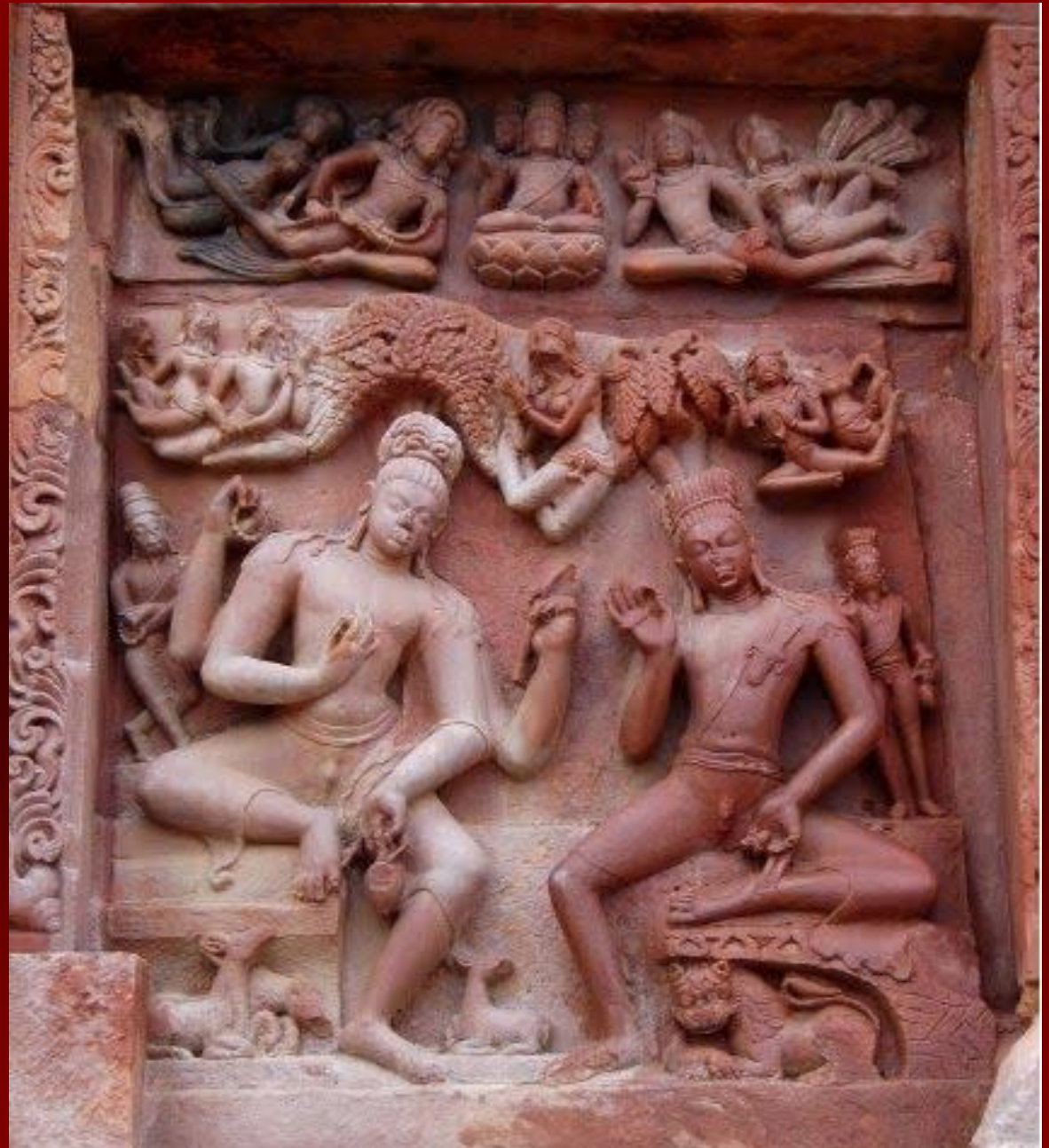
A marvellous composition!



Gajendra-moksha



# Nara-Narayana





Mithuna-s on the basement

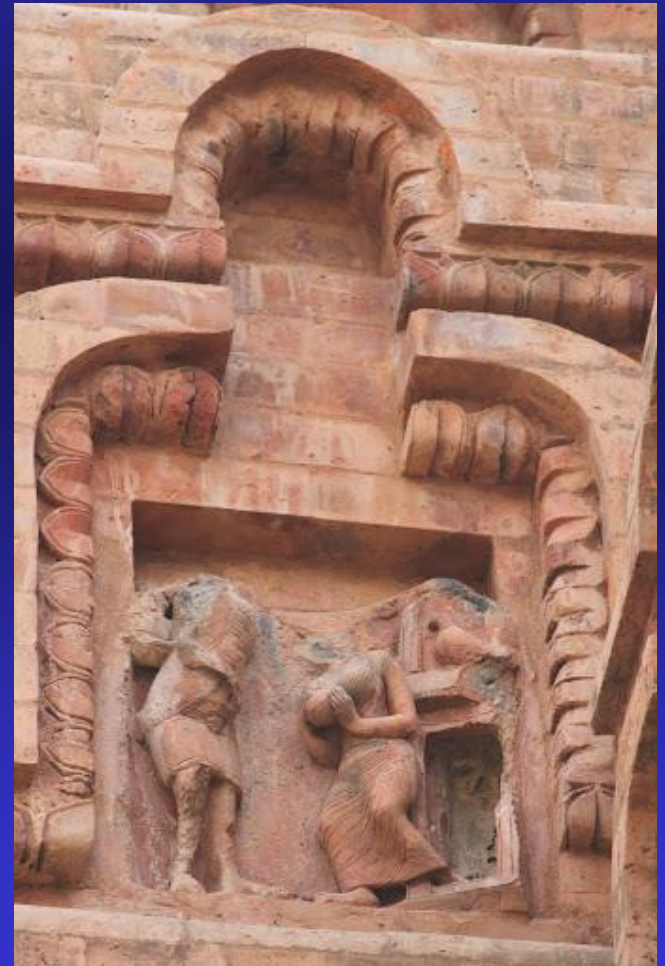
This is another *shikhara*-type  
Gupta temple



Bhitargaon near Kanpur



The walls are decorated with terracotta panels depicting mythological scenes.



Sita giving alms to Ravana



Some ornamentation

Now let us see the sculptures of this period

The image of the Buddha  
was developed to classical perfection,  
and became the model thereafter.

Perhaps the newer expressions and refinement first came from the sculptors of Mathura.

Working on the available red sandstone, the figures still has the memories of massive and ponderous weight of the earlier period.



Mathura school



Mathura -Gupta period



Came out, then, splendid images of the Buddha  
the calm, delicate face no longer looking out  
at the world,  
the vision is turned within,  
the mood being one of serene contemplation.



Mathura school



Mathura -Gupta period

The body is most subtly modelled  
by smoothly flowing planes that both  
suggest the swelling force of life and  
subordinate it to the spiritual vision of the whole.

It is characterised by its refinement,  
by a clear delineation and definition of the features.  
by curly hair  
greater variety of *mudras*,  
elaborately decorated nimbus,  
the robe covering one or both shoulders and  
extremely diaphanous,  
sitting or standing on lotus or lotus pedestal



Buddha from Mathura  
in red sandstone

These Mathura images established  
an iconographical type  
that became the norm for the Buddha image.

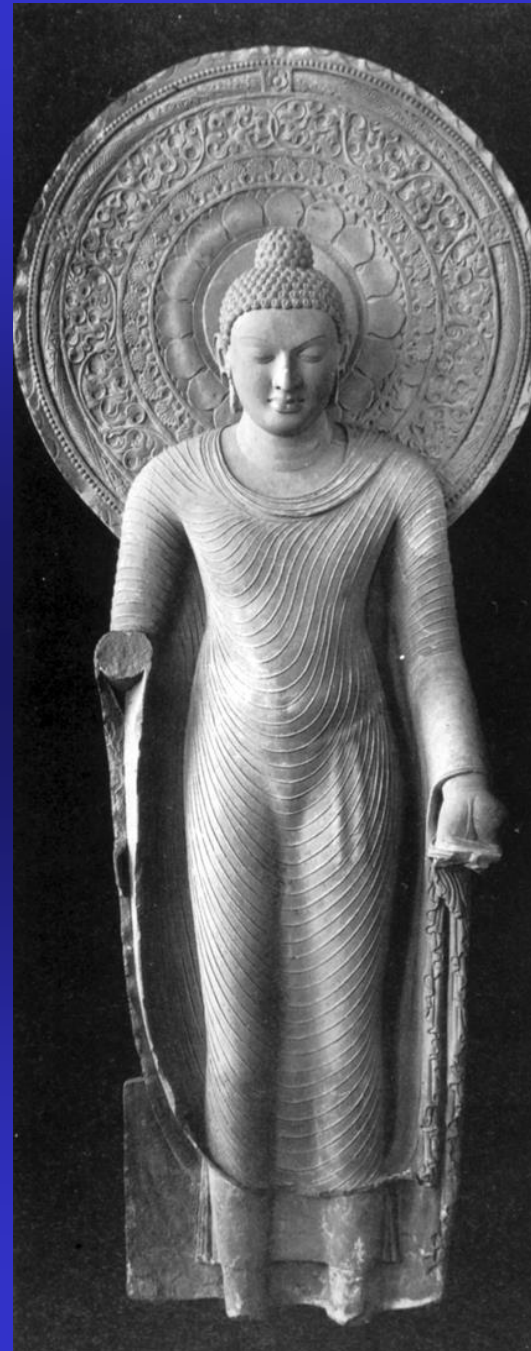
With the greater and more dynamic  
Hindu devotion which later  
culminated in the Krishna cult,  
came perfection in modelling Hindu gods.



Katra Keshavadeva, Mathura

Vishnu conceived as a royal figure and wearing dress and jewellery appropriate to the station, presents a dignified calm to suit the function of preserver of all living beings.

Saranth developed even more elegant, the locally available Chunar sandstone whose surface affording even more abstractly handling.





Delicately carved, the face, with serene features and a gentle smile playing on the lips, suggests the joy of supreme spiritual achievement.

The halo behind the Buddha is also very beautifully carved, with exquisite floral patterns.





An exquisite bronze from this period

The Hindu images, too,  
went by the physical beauty of their figures,  
dignity of their divinity and grace  
of their spiritual being.  
And here are a number of specimens.



Episodes from Ramayana  
and Krishna lila  
have been popular.

Here we see  
Surpanaka being punished  
by Lakshmana,  
a lively portrayal

Deogarh

# Ahalya shapa-vimochana



Deogarh

# Udhayagiri, close to Sanchi



There are twenty caves, many of them no more than niches, but these contain some exquisite sculptures of this period

The fact these are almost of the same period of the later Ajanta caves, the crudity of excavations is surprising, but the sculptures don't.



Cave 5

Cave 6





This is not only the most magnificent composition but forerunner of masterpieces all over the country



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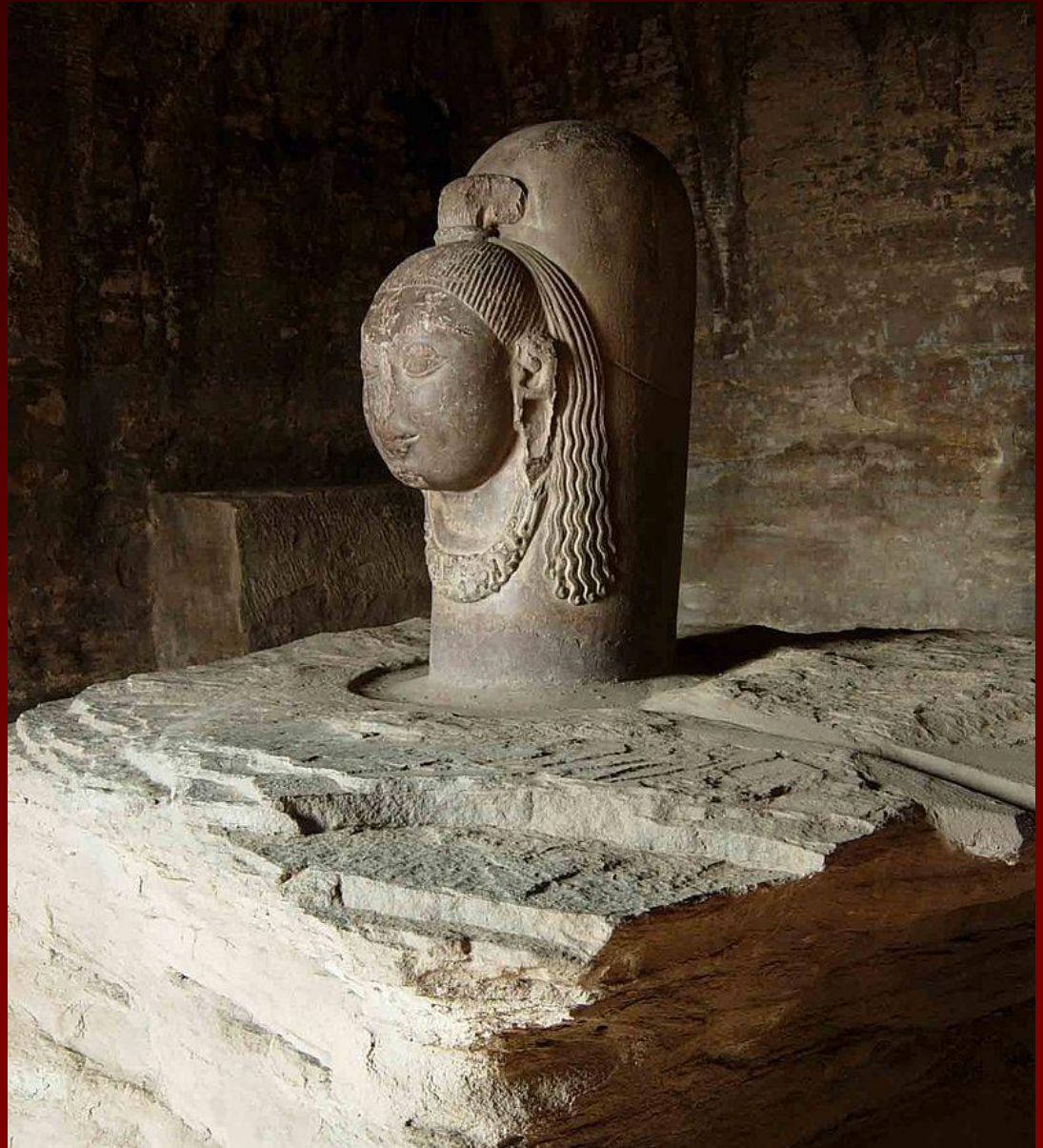


Another forerunner for Ananatasayana Vishnu – Cave 13

Another view



It is a spectacular  
Siva-linga.  
The top-knot and  
cascading locks  
on either side  
remind  
the Gangadhara  
episode



Mukha-linga, Cave 4

The image shows the exterior of Cave 6, a rock-cut structure with a central doorway. The doorway is flanked by two large standing figures. Above the doorway is a decorative archway. To the left of the doorway is a seated figure, and to the right is another standing figure. The entire facade is carved into the natural rock surface. A small white sign with the number '6' is placed above the doorway. The ceiling of the cave is dark and appears to be made of a different material or is in shadow.

Ganga-Yamuna

6

Ganesa

Vishnu

Siva

Façade of Cave 6



Dvarapala



Gangadhara

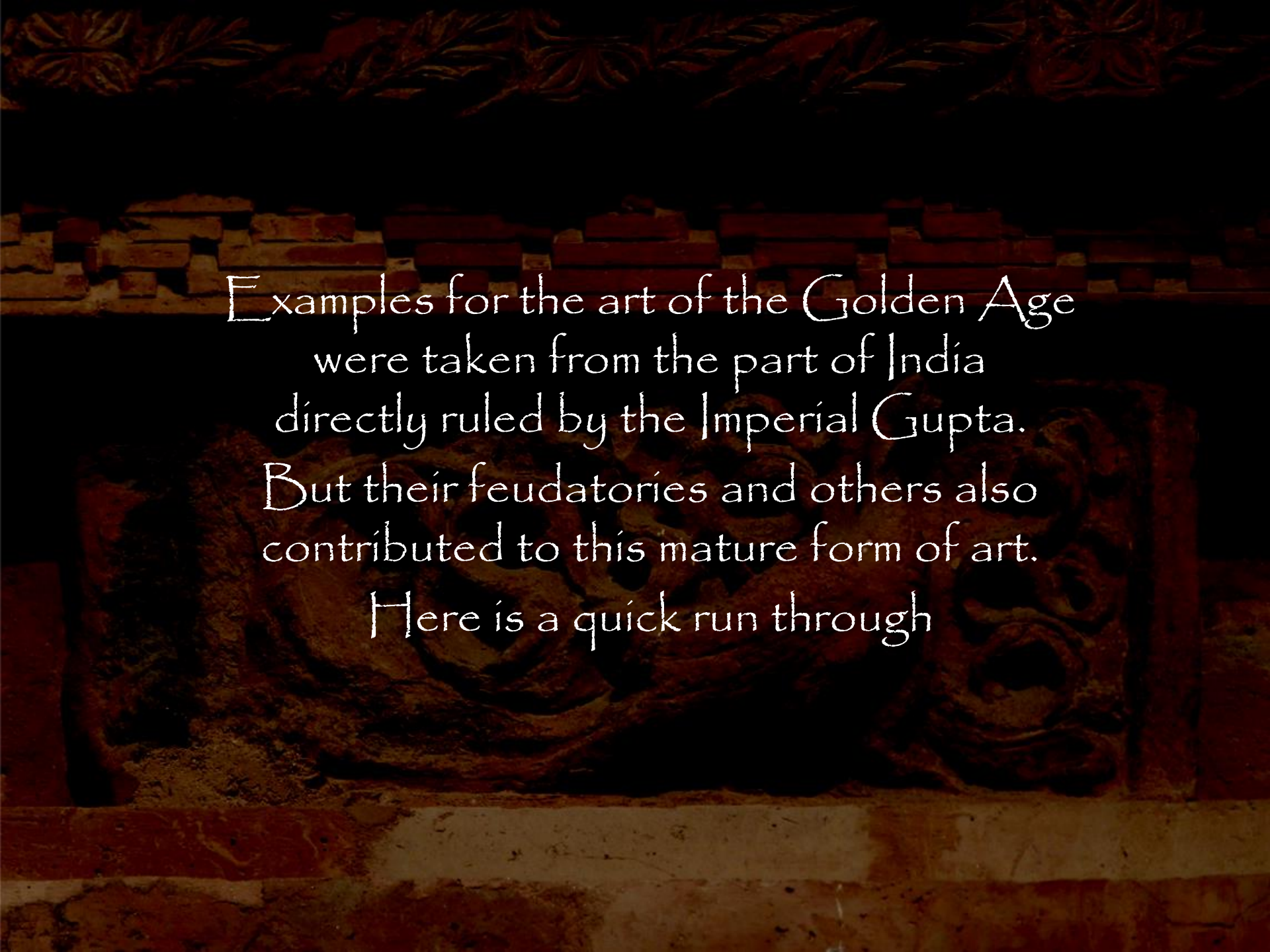


Mahishasuramardini



Ganesa

Interestingly this is the earliest Ganesa in the country



Examples for the art of the Golden Age  
were taken from the part of India  
directly ruled by the Imperial Gupta.

But their feudatories and others also  
contributed to this mature form of art.

Here is a quick run through



Vakarakas ,who had matrimonial relationship with the Guptas, were also great patrons of art.

This dynasty was responsible for the later caves of Ajanta.

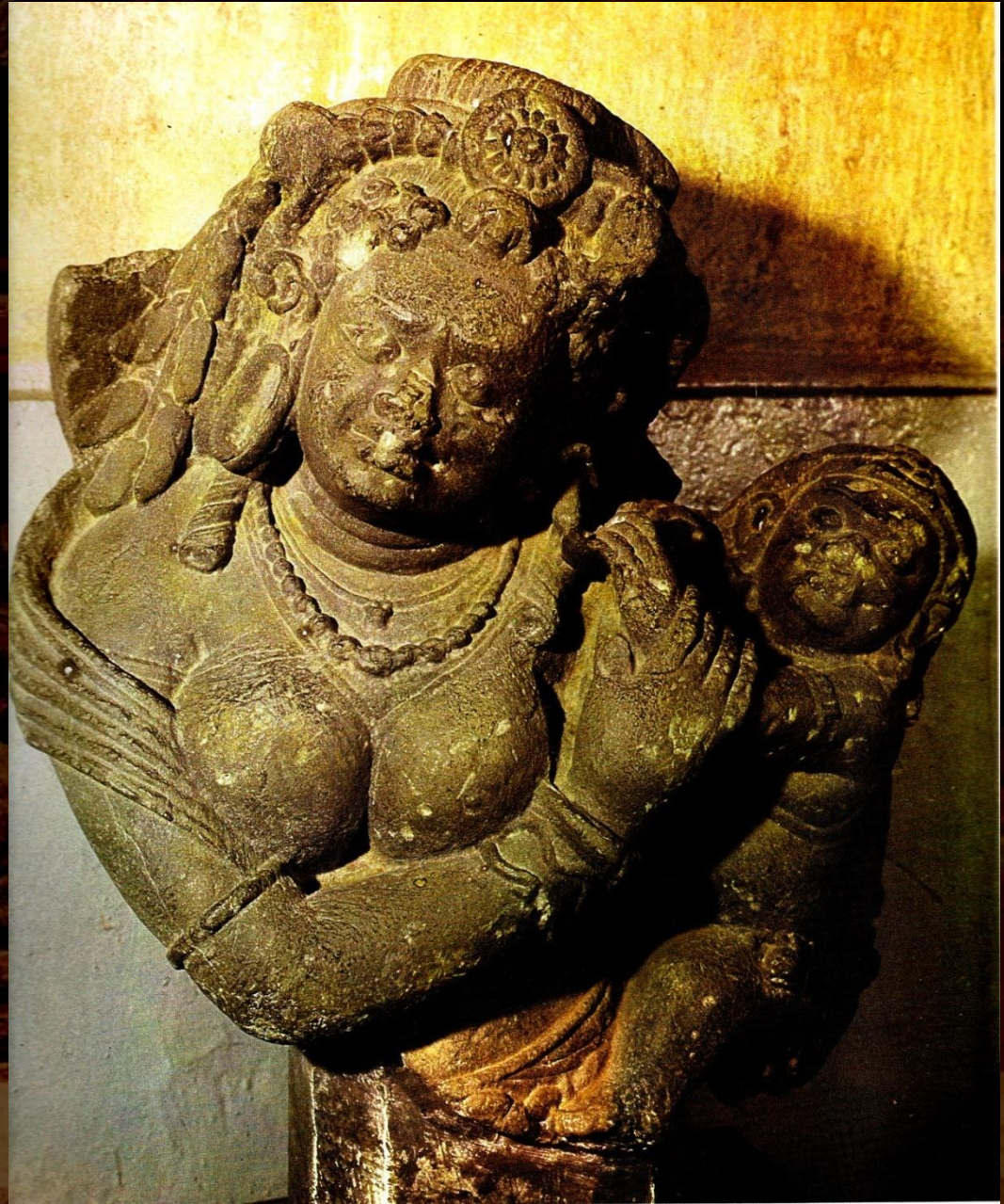
Siva personified as saptaswara, with four ganas playing musical instruments; 4<sup>th</sup> cent. CE





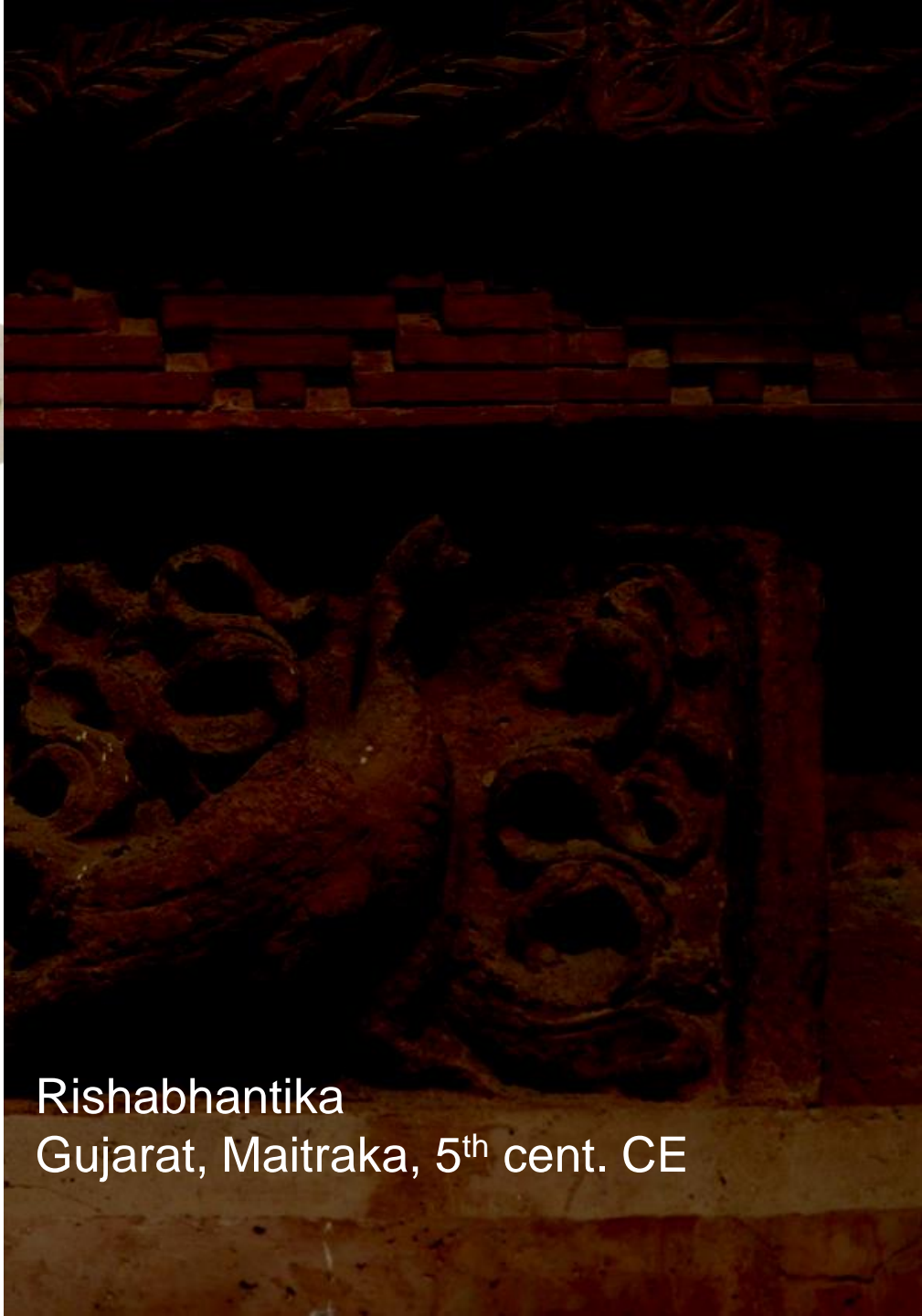
Siva as supreme dancer; Ellora,  
Vakataka, 5-6<sup>th</sup> cent. CE

Mother and child  
Gujarat, Maitraka, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE





Rishabhantika  
Gujarat, Maitraka, 5<sup>th</sup> cent. CE



Thus a beginning was made by the Guptas,  
and many later dynasties further embellished the art.  
Let us hear what Ananda Coomaraswamy says:

*. . . Gupta sculpture,  
though less ponderous than the ancient types,  
is still distinguished by its volume;  
its energy proceeds from within the form,  
and is static rather than kinetic,  
a condition that is reversed only  
in the mediaeval period.*

Yes, it looks the Pallavas went further!



## Discussion

It is often claimed that this period is  
one of the revival of Hinduism and  
of Sanskrit learning and literature.

Is this true?

Ramayana as a *kavya* has pre-existed and  
so was celebrated the grand epic Mahabharata  
and a few *purana*-s,  
all these pointing  
to centuries of intense and creative activity.

Perhaps, the period was a culmination,  
of florescence, rather than renaissance.



We are able to follow the development of  
Buddhist temple architecture  
from the 3<sup>rd</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE, and  
also the Buddhist iconography systematically.

But we come to Hindu temple architecture  
only from the Gupta time,  
though we get figures of Hindu gods  
earlier than this.

Didn't the Hindus worship in temples?

Was the Vedic ritual the only form of worship by people?



Bye, till we meet next time  
when we will follow the rhapsody of Indian paintings



நன்றி