

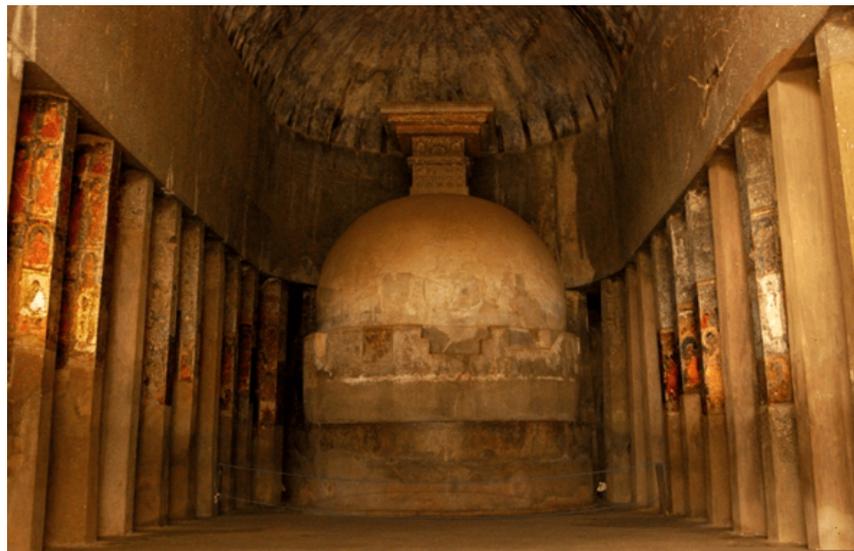
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## Cave Tradition in Western India and Ajanta

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- Mainly three architectural types were executed
- (i) apsidal vault roof chaitya halls (found at Ajanta, Pitalkhora, Bhaja) ;



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(ii) Apsidal vault-roof pillar less hall (found at Thana-Nadsur) ; and (iii) flat-roofed quadrangular hall with a circular chamber at the back (found at Kondivite) .

- The front of the chaityahall is dominated by the motif of a semi-circular chaityaarch with an open front which has a wooden façade and, in some cases, there is no dominating chaityaarch window such as found at Kondivite.
- In all the chaitya caves a stupa at the back is common. Rectangular like at Ajanta Cave No. 9.
- Found at Bedsa, Nashik, Karla and Kanheri.
- Many cave sites have the standard first type of chaitya halls in the subsequent period.
- In Karla, the biggest rock-cut chaitya hall was excavated. Karla chaityahall is decorated with human and animal figures.
- The Karla chaityahall plan is observed at Kanheri Cave No. 3.
- Though the cave's interior was not fully finished, it shows how the carving progressed from time to time.

- Subsequently, the quadrangular flat-roofed variety became the most preferred design and is extensively found at many places.
- The Viharas are excavated in all the cave sites.
- The plan of the Viharas consists of a veranda, a hall and cells around the walls of the hall.
- Some of the important vihara caves are Ajanta Cave No. 12, Bedsa Cave No. 11, and Nashik Cave Nos. 3,10 and 17.
- Many of the early vihara caves are carved with interior decorative motifs like chaityaarches and the vedica designs over the cell doors of the cave.
- Facade design in Nashik Cave Nos. 3,10, and 17 became a distinct achievement.
- The vihara caves at Nashik were excavated with front pillars carved with ghata-base and ghata-capital with human figures.
- One such vihara cave was also excavated at Junnar which is popularly known as Ganeshleni because an image of Ganesha belonging to a later period was installed in it.
- Later, a stupa was added at the back of the hall of the vihara and it became a chaitya-vihara.
- The stupas in the fourth and fifth centuries CE have Buddha images attached.
- Junnar has the largest cave excavations — more than two hundred caves around the hills of the town — whereas Kanheri in Mumbai has a hundred and eight excavated caves.
- The most important sites are Ajanta, Pitalkhora, Ellora, Nashik, Bhaja, Junnar, Karla, Kanheri.
- Ajanta, Ellora, and Kanheri continue to flourish.
- Because of the absence of the Buddha image, the caves were considered belonging to the orthodox faith of Buddhism, i.e., the Theravada, but with the discovery of the Konkan Maurya inscription mentioning the Sakaera 322, i.e., 400 CE, it is now satisfactorily proved that the cave activity in western Deccan was an ongoing process and many caves had been carved with Buddha images where the image does not exist anymore.
- Many caves are converted into modern Hindu shrines and have become popular worshipping sites.

## **Ajanta**

- The most famous cave site is Ajanta.



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- It is located in Aurangabad District of Maharashtra State.
- Ajanta has twenty-nine caves.

- It has four chaityacaves datable to the earlier phase, i.e., the second and the first century BCE (Cave Nos. 10 and 9) and the later phase, i.e., the fifth century CE (Cave Nos. 19 and 26) .
- It has large chaitya Viharas and is decorated with sculptures and paintings.
- Ajanta is the only surviving example of painting of the first century BCE and the fifth century CE.
- The caves at Ajanta as well as in western Deccan in general have no precise chronology because of the lack of known dated inscriptions.
- Cave Nos. 10,9, 12 and 13 belong to the early phase, Caves Nos. 11,15 and 6 upper and lower, and Cave No. 7 belong to the phase earlier than late fifth century CE.
- The rest of the caves belong to late fifth century CE to early sixth century CE.
- The chaitya Cave Nos. 19 and 26 are elaborately carved.
- Their facade is decorated with Buddha and, Boddhisattva images.
- They are of the apsidal-vault-roof variety. Cave No. 26 is very big and the entire interior hall is carved with a variety of Buddha images, the biggest one being the Mahaparinibbana image.
- The rest of the caves are vihara-chaitya caves.
- They consist of a pillared veranda, a pillared hall and cells along the walls. The back wall has the main Buddha shrine.
- Shrine images at Ajanta are grand in size.
- Some of the vihara caves are unfinished such as Cave Nos. 5, 14,23 24,28 and 29.
- Among the important patrons at Ajanta were Varahadeva (patron of Cave No. 16) , the prime minister of the Vakataks king, Harishena; Upendra gupta (patron of Cave Nos. 17 – 20) the local king of the region and feudatory of the Vakataka king, Harishena; Buddhabhadra (patron of Cave No. 26) ; and Mathuradasa (patron of Cave No. 4) . Many paintings have survived in Cave Nos. 1,2, 16 and 17.
- Various skin colours are used in the paintings such as brown, yellowish brown, greenish, yellow ochre, etc. which represent a multi coloured population.
- Brown thick dark lines are used as contours.
- Lines are forceful and full of energy.
- Also made to give highlights in the figural compositions.
- The themes of the paintings are the events from the life of the Buddha, the Jatakas and the Avadanas. Paintings such as Simhala Avadana, Mahajanaka Jataka and Vidharpundita Jataka cover the entire wall of the cave.
- Chhadanta Jatakas been painted in the early Cave No. 10 with many details and events grouped according to their geographical locations.
- Events that happened in the jungle and events that happened in the palace are separated by their locations.
- In Cave No. 10 Chaddanta faithfully follows the Pali text whereas the one painted in Cave No. 17 is very different. In one of the events, the Boddhisattva, Chaddanta, is shown removing his own tusk and giving it to the hunter, Sonuttar.
- The other important paintings are the famous Padmapani and Vajrapani in Cave No. 1.



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- The images of Padmapani and Vajrapani are very common in Ajanta but the best-preserved paintings are in Cave No. 1. Some figures in Cave No. 2 have affiliation with the Vengi sculptures and at the same time, the influence of the Vidarbha sculptural tradition is also observed in the delineation of some sculptures.

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