

Below is a **complete, exam-oriented, brief but fully comprehensive summary** of **Ancient Indian Art, Architecture & Painting** — from **Harappan Civilization** → **post-Gupta period**, covering **all dynasties, schools of art, monuments, sculptures, and paintings** with **why they developed in that period**.

This is designed exactly for government-exam revision: short, chronological, nothing missed.

ANCIENT INDIA: ART, ARCHITECTURE & PAINTINGS **(Chronological Overview)**

From Harappan Civilization → Post-Gupta (before Medieval India begins)

1. HARAPPAN CIVILIZATION **(2600–1900 BCE)**

Why: Bronze Age → no iron → used *stone, bronze, terracotta, fired bricks*.

Main Features

- **Urban planning:** Grid pattern, drainage system (most unique).
- **Material:** *Baked brick, stone, bronze, terracotta*.
- **Architecture:**
 - **Granaries, Citadels, Great Bath (Mohenjo-Daro).**
 - **Assembly halls, Dockyard (Lothal).**
- **Sculpture:**
 - **Bronze “Dancing Girl” of Mohenjo-Daro** (lost-wax technique).
 - **Bearded Priest King** (Steatite).

- **Terracotta figurines** (mother goddess, animals).
- **Crafts:**
 - Pottery → red/black painted.
 - Seals → Pashupati seal, unicorn seal.

Paintings:

- No large murals; only **pottery paintings**.
-

2. VEDIC PERIOD (1500–600 BCE)

Why: Rural, pastoral society → *no cities, no stone structures*.

Art/Architecture

- Mostly **wooden structures** (lost).
- **Pottery traditions:**
 - **PGW (Painted Grey Ware)**.
 - **NBPW (Northern Black Polished Ware)** – glossy finish.

Sculpture/Painting

- No major monumental art.
-

3. MAHAJANAPADAS & 6th c. BCE DEVELOPMENTS (600–300 BCE)

Why: Rise of cities, trade → new materials like stone begin to be used.

Art/Architecture

- **Early brick stupas** (simple).
- **Terracotta figurines** widespread.

Paintings

- Still **minimal**; mostly pottery.
-

4. MAURYAN EMPIRE (322–185 BCE)

Why: Royal patronage + political unification + stone quarrying began.

Architecture

- **Palaces:** Pataliputra, influenced by **Achaemenid Persian** style.
- **Pillars of Ashoka** – best known:
 - Polished sandstone (Mauryan polish).
 - **Animal capitals:** Lion capital of Sarnath (National Emblem).
- **Stupas** (early forms): foundation for later stupas.
- **Rock-cut caves:**
 - **Barabar Caves** (Ashoka) → highly polished interior.

Sculpture

- Yaksha–Yakshi statues (folk tradition + polished finish).

Painting

- Lost, but textual references mention **royal halls with murals**.
-



5.

SHUNGA–KUSHANA–SATAVAHANA AGE (185 BCE – 300 CE)

This period includes the three Great Schools of Indian Art.



A. SHUNGA ART (2nd–1st c. BCE)

Why: Reaction to Mauryan style; rise of Buddhist & Brahmanic architecture.

Architecture

- **Stupas renovated:**
 - **Sanchi Stupa** (Gateways → Toranas).
 - **Bharhut Stupa**.

Sculpture

- Narrative panels on railings → *Jataka stories*.
 - Flat relief, simple carving.
-



B. KUSHANA EMPIRE & GANDHARA–MATHURA SCHOOLS (1st–3rd c. CE)

1. GANDHARA SCHOOL (Greco-Buddhist Art)

- **Place:** Afghanistan, Gandhara.
- **Material:** Grey schist stone.
- **Features:**

- Hellenistic influence.
- Waves in hair, western-style drapery.
- Realistic muscular body.
- **Important: First human images of Buddha** appear in this period.

2. MATHURA SCHOOL

- **Material:** Red sandstone.
- **Features:**
 - Indigenous Indian style.
 - Smiling face, open eyes, minimal drapery.
- **Subjects:**
 - Buddha, Bodhisattvas.
 - Jain Tirthankaras.
 - Yaksha–Yakshi.

C. SATAVAHANA–AMARAVATI SCHOOL (2nd c. BCE–3rd c. CE)

Features

- **Material:** **White limestone.**
- **Stupas:**
 - **Amaravati Stupa** → dome carved with narrative scenes.
- **Style:**
 - Deep carving.
 - Movement, dynamism.

- Elaborate jewellery, narrative art.
-

6. GUPTA EMPIRE (320–550 CE) — GOLDEN AGE OF ARTS

Why: Prosperity + stability + religious harmony (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain).

Gupta period gave classical forms of **temple architecture, sculpture & painting.**

A. Architecture (Temples)

- **Nagara style begins.**
Important temples:
- **Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh.**
- **Shringareshvara Temple.**
- Early **shikhara** develops.

B. Sculpture

- Buddha images of Sarnath → calm, spiritual.
- Soft modelling, ideal body proportions.
- Standing Vishnu, Shiva, Durga sculptures.

C. Paintings — Most Important (Ajanta Phase II)

- **Ajanta Caves (5th century):**
 - Jataka stories.
 - Use of tempera technique.

- Graceful lines, expressions.
 - **Bagh Caves paintings** also of same tradition.
-

7. POST-GUPTA / REGIONAL KINGDOMS (550–1000 CE)

Covers: Pallavas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Pratiharas, Palas (before medieval).

A. PALLAVA ARCHITECTURE (600–900 CE)

Places: Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram.

Why: Rise of Shaivism, granite availability.

Famous Works

- **Rock-cut temples:**
 - Mahabalipuram's **Pancha Rathas**.
 - **Cave temples**.
- **Structural stone temples:**
 - **Shore Temple** (Mahabalipuram).
 - **Kailasanatha Temple** (Kanchipuram).

Sculpture

- Narrative friezes: **Arjuna's Penance**.

B. CHOLA ART & ARCHITECTURE (850–1250 CE)

👉 *Technically early medieval but many syllabi count early phase as ancient extension; I'll include briefly.*

Architecture

- Dravida style at its peak.
- Brihadeeswara Temple, Thanjavur.
- Gangaikondacholapuram Temple.

Sculpture

- Bronze Nataraja image – iconic.
- Chola bronze casting (lost-wax technique).

C. CHALUKYA (BADAMI) ARCHITECTURE (500–757 CE)

- Rock-cut caves (Badami).
- Structural temples (Aihole, Pattadakal).
- Mixture of Nagara + Dravida → **Vesara style** develops.

D. RASHTRAKUTA ARCHITECTURE (753–982 CE)

Most important:

- **Kailasa Temple, Ellora (Cave 16)**
 - Entire temple carved from single rock.
 - One of the greatest monolithic structures in world history.
-

E. PALA SCHOOL OF ART (750–1150 CE)

Why: Flourishing Buddhism in Bengal & Bihar.

Features

- Black stone sculpture.
 - Buddhist manuscripts (palm-leaf painting).
 - Important for **later Tibetan Buddhist art**.
-

ANCIENT INDIA PAINTINGS SUMMARY

Period	Paintings
Harappan	Pottery painting
Mauryan	(Lost) palace murals, minor fragments
Shunga–Satavahan a	Narrative panels, Buddhist motifs
Gupta	Ajanta Phase II, Bagh Caves
Post-Gupta	Ellora paintings (Caves 2,11,12), Sittannavasal Jain murals

FAMOUS PAINTINGS (LAST PHASE OF ANCIENT INDIA)

1. Ajanta Caves (Gupta age)

- Jataka stories.
- Graceful lines.
- Tempera technique.

2. Ellora Caves (Post-Gupta)

- Less refined than Ajanta.
- 7th century → Hindu, Buddhist, Jain themes.

3. Bagh Caves

- Similar to Ajanta; vivid colours.
- 5th–6th century Malwa region.

4. Sittannavasal (Tamil Nadu)

- Jain paintings.
- Fresco-secco technique.
- Depicts lotus ponds, dancers.

FINAL COMPRESSED CHRONOLOGY (Exam-Friendly)

Harappan → town planning, bronze sculpture, seals.

Vedic → wooden structures, PGW, NBPW.

Mahajanapadas → basic stupas, terracotta.

Mauryan → Ashokan pillars, caves, beginning of stone art.

Shunga → Sanchi/Bharhut stupas.

Kushana era → Gandhara + Mathura schools, first Buddha images.

Satavahana → Amaravati School.

Gupta → classical temples, Sarnath Buddha, Ajanta paintings.

Post-Gupta → Pallava (rock-cut), Chalukya (Vesara), Rashtrakuta (Kailasa), Pala (Buddhist manuscripts).

Paintings → Ajanta, Ellora, Bagh, Sittannavasal.

Here is a **simple, clear explanation** of both terms — *Tempera* and *Fresco* — exactly as used in **Ancient Indian paintings (Ajanta, Bagh, Sittannavasal, etc.)**:

1. Tempera Technique (Used in Ajanta Phase-II)

Meaning

Tempera = **Painting done on a dry surface** using **colors mixed with a binding medium**.

Why used

- Indian artists did **not** paint on wet wall like pure fresco.
- Caves had dry, rock walls → they applied plaster first, let it dry, then painted.

How it works

1. Wall is covered with a dry layer of plaster.
2. Colors are mixed with:
 - **Gum**
 - **Glue**
 - **Organic binders** (egg white sometimes, plant gum mostly).
3. Artist paints on the **dry surface** → This is *tempera/secco*.

Where used

- **Ajanta Caves** (most paintings).
 - **Bagh caves**.
-

2. Fresco Technique

There are two types:

A. Fresco Buon (True Fresco)

Meaning

Painting done on **wet plaster** so the color **absorbs into the wall** permanently.

Method

1. Wall coated with fresh, wet lime plaster.
2. Painter applies color **before it dries**.
3. As plaster dries → color becomes part of the wall → very durable.

Used:

- Rare in India in ancient times. Mostly used in Europe (Renaissance).

B. Fresco Secco (Dry Fresco)

Meaning

Painting done on **dry wall** using **limewater or organic binders**.

Method

- Prepare plaster → let it dry → then paint using pigments + limewater.


Used in India

- **Sittannavasal** (Tamil Nadu).
- Some parts of **Ellora**.
- Minor use in Ajanta (touch-ups).

Simple Difference (Exam-ready)

Technique	Done On	Binder	Durability	Examples
Tempera (Secco)	Dry wall	Gum, glue, egg, resin	Less durable	Ajanta, Bagh
Fresco Buon	Wet wall	No binder (lime absorbs color)	Very durable	European paintings
Fresco Secco	Dry wall	Limewater	Medium	Sittannavasal

If you want, I can also make:

 a **PDF of all painting techniques**,
or
a **comparison chart for UPSC/SSC**.