

The Pala dynasty ruled from 8th Century to 12th cent. CE in the regions comprising Bihar and Bengal. The development of art had been in a full fledged manner during the Mauryas and Guptas which was further carried by the Pala rulers.

Distinctive achievements of Palas are seen in the arts of architecture, sculpture, terracotta, painting and wall painting.

The Pala art came to a sudden end after the destruction of the Buddhist monasteries ~~at~~ by the Muslim invaders in the first half of the 13th Century. Some of the monks and artists escaped and fled to Nepal, which helped in the reinforcing the existing art traditions there.

## ARCHITECTURE

- Most of the architecture were religious. Various Mahaviharas, Stupas, Chaityas, Temples and forts were constructed. The first two hundred years of Pala period art were dominated by Buddhist art and the latter two hundred years by Hindu art.
- Among the various Mahaviharas, Nalanda, Vikramshila, Traikutaki, Devikota, Pandita Vihara are notable.
- Dharmapala built the Vikramshila mahavihara (at Patharghat in Bhagalpur district of Bihar) and Odantpuri Vihara in Bihar. Somapura Vihara and Vikramshila vihara were the important centres of Buddhist learning. Odantpuri Mahavihara was so magnificent that it served as a model for first monastery built in Tibet.

- The rock-cut cave temple at Kahalgaon dating from 9th cent. shows the gabled vaulted roof characteristics of the south Indian architecture.
- The Somapura mahavihara at Paharpur, built by Dharmapala, shows the excellence of the architectural art achieved in the Pala Period. It is one of the largest Buddhist Vihara in the Indian subcontinent and in the Nalanda inscription of Vipulasrimitra it has been described as jagatam netraikavishroma bhu (pleasing to the eyes of the world).
- The brick built Siva temple at Konch in Gaya district is famous for its curvilinear Shikhara and corbelled lancet window.

### Terracotta

Artistic and beautiful form of terracotta were developed during the Pala Period, for the purpose of decoration. Statues were made on walls depicting the scenes from religious and general life. For example, terracotta plaque recovered from Paharpur, recognised as unique creation of Bengal artists, amply demonstrate the excellence of the art.

### Sculpture

The Gupta tradition of sculptural art attained a new height under the patronage of the Pala rulers and it came to be designated as 'Pala School of Sculptural Art'. The art incorporated lot of local characteristics in Bengal under the Palas and it continued right up to the end of 12<sup>th</sup> century.

The sculptures of stones and bronze were constructed in large no. mostly in monastic sites of Nalanda, Bihar Sharif, Rajgir, Bodh Gaya etc.

Most of the sculptures of this period drew their inspiration from Buddhism. Apart from Buddha, sculptures of God and Goddess of Hindu Religion like Vishnu, Ganesha, Balram, ~~and~~ shiva were also constructed.

Some of the finest sculptures of this school include a female bust, two standing Avalokiteshwara images from Nalanda. Buddhist sculptures is characterised by a prominent and elaborately carved black-slab and lotus-seat, frequently supported by lions.

Bronze sculptures are casted in dies. Bronze casting was an important feature of Pala sculptures. Such sculptures have been found from Nalanda and Kukrihar (near Gaya). Bronze figures were usually cast by the 'cire perdue' process.

The main features of Pala sculptures is their free flowing movement. Almost all the figures are of similar sizes.

## Painting

The earliest examples of miniature painting in India exist in the form of illustrations to the religious texts on Buddhism executed under the Palas of the eastern India.

There are two forms of paintings: Manuscripts and Wall painting

- Manuscripts were written on palm leaves. In these paintings, scenes of life of Buddha and several god and goddess of

Mahayana sects are depicted. The impact of Tantricism on these paintings are easily visible

- Decorative paintings could be seen on manuscripts depending on the subject matter.
- The Pala painting is characterised by sinuous line, delicate and nervous lines, sensuous elegance, linear and decorative accent and subdued tones of colour. It is a naturalistic style which resembles the ideal forms of contemporary bronze and stone sculpture and reflects some feeling of the classical art of Ajanta with sensuous bias of art of Eastern India.
- Wall painting has been found in Saradh and Sarai Sthal in Nalanda district. We can find flowers of geometric shapes, images of animals and humans. The images have faded now, yet certain images like elephant, horses, dancers, Bodhisattvas etc. can be noticed.