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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF THE RASHTRAKUTA DYNASTY

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### Abstract

The present study explores the development, magnificence, and diversity of religions that characterised the art and architecture of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8th–10th centuries CE), a noteworthy period in early mediaeval Indian cultural heritage. The Rashtrakutas, who lived mostly in the Deccan, were excellent art patrons who promoted the growth of sculpture, temple building, and rock-cut architecture. The Ellora Caves, especially the breathtaking Kailasa Temple, showcase their most notable contribution. Dedicated to Lord Shiva, this gigantic rock-cut temple is regarded as one of the world's greatest architectural feats. It is carved from a single rock and exhibits sophisticated engineering, fine sculptural craftsmanship, and a tasteful fusion of regional and Dravidian architectural features. The Rashtrakutas demonstrated their sophisticated knowledge of military and hydraulic engineering through architectural achievements that extended beyond religious buildings to include fortresses and civil engineering projects. In addition to the tangible buildings that still stand today, the Rashtrakuta era left a lasting influence on later architectural trends and cultural customs in the Deccan. All things considered, the architectural wonders of the Rashtrakuta era represent a rich fusion of engineering, craftsmanship, and spirituality, leaving a lasting impression on India's historical and cultural milieu. The dynasty's vision, inventiveness, and impact are still evident in this era, which subsequently shaped the development of Indian architecture for centuries.

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### Introduction:-

The Rashtrakuta dynasty (8th–10th century CE) contributed some of the most outstanding monuments of early mediaeval Indian art and architecture. Having Manyakheta as its capital, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty controlled a sizable portion of the Deccan and was a major sponsor of rock-cut architecture, sculpture, and temple construction. The Rashtrakutas significantly influenced the architectural heritage of the Deccan. Rashtrakuta's contributions to art and architecture can be seen in the beautiful rock-cut cave temples at Ellora and Elephanta in modern-day Maharashtra (Radhamma2016). The Ellora site was once part of a complex of 34 Buddhist caves, of Pandyan influence, constructed in rocky locations during the first half of the sixth century and also inhabited by Jain

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monks. Hindus were only able to occupy cave temples later. The Buddhist caves were restored, and the Rashtrakutas rededicated the rock-cut shrines. Five Jain cave temples in Ellora are from the time of Amoghavarsha I, who was a devout Jain (Doddamani,2015). The monolithic Kailashnath temple, the Rashtrakutas' most massive and opulent creation at Ellora, is a spectacular accomplishment that validates the "Balhara's" rank as "one of the four principal kings of the world."Magnificent sculptures from Hindu mythology, including Parvathi, Shiva, and Ravana, adorn the temple's walls, while the ceilings are painted.

The relationship of Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu monuments in Rashtrakuta art is another example of religious plurality. Their sculptures, which often feature mythological themes and divine characters, are renowned for their dynamic forms, intricate decoration, and rich narratives. They fostered literary and cultural endeavors, in addition to building rock-cut structures and temples (Sweta. 2016). All factors considered, Rashtrakuta art and architecture bear witness to their governmental might, religious tolerance, and artistic brilliance, leaving an indelible impression on Indian art and culture.The Rashtrakutas' inventive rock-cutting methods, massive buildings, and elaborate sculptures made a lasting impression on Indian art and architecture(Czuma, 1968).Their legacy, particularly at Ellora, demonstrates a flawless fusion of artistic skill, religious dedication, and mechanical prowess, solidifying their status as one of the greatest benefactors of Indian cultural history.

### **Objectives of the Study:-**

**The major objectives of the Art and Architecture of the Rashtrakutas Dynasty are as follows:**

1. Religious Expression and Devotion;
2. Demonstration of Royal Power and Prestige;
3. Advancement of Artistic Excellence;
4. Architectural Innovation and
5. Cultural Integration and Legacy.

### **Methods and Materials:-**

For the study, the art and architectural accomplishments of the Rashtrakutas (8th–10th centuries CE) can be systematically understood through a precise methodology. An organised method frequently employed in art history, archaeology, and history. Historical Perspective: Learn about the political, religious, and cultural context of leaders such as Krishna I and Amoghavarsha I. Site Assessment: Examine key sites, including the Kailasa Temple and the Ellora Caves. To enable a complete understanding of Rashtrakuta art, the methodology integrates historical context, site observation, architectural and sculptural analysis, and supporting resources.

### **Result and Discussion:-**

#### **Religious Expression and Devotion:-**

A rich, varied, and intensely spiritual culture is reflected in the religious expression and devotion of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8th–10th centuries CE). Through art, architecture, literature, and royal patronage, various religious traditions, particularly Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, interacted vibrantly during their dominion over a significant portion of the Deccan.

#### **Religious Tolerance and Pluralism:-**

Religious inclusion was one of Rashtrakuta's most notable characteristics:Kings did not impose a state religion; instead, they supported several religions concurrently. Religions coexisted together, frequently in the same cultural settings. One of the best examples is the well-known Ellora Caves, where Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu caves coexist. Rather than being adherents of a particular sect, monarchs considered themselves as guardians of dharma, which is reflected in this plurality.



**Kailasa temple, Ellora caves, Jain rock-cut cave temples at Ellora Caves and Buddhist rock cut cave temples** ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashtrakuta\\_Empire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rashtrakuta_Empire))

**Hindu Religious Expression:-**

It refers to the clear through their religious manifestations that the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (753–982 CE) was a major sponsor of Hinduism. Lord Shiva is the main theme of temples like Ellora's Kailasa Temple. Vishnu is worshipped in Vaishnavism, as evidenced by sculptures and temple dedications. Temple architecture: magnificent buildings adorned with elaborate sculptures that often depict Hindu epics such as the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.



**Carving in Kailasa Temple, at Ellora cave, Rashtrakuta Dynasty and Shiva Nataraja - Lord of the Dance - World History Encyclopedia**

**Jainism and Royal Patronage:-**

Jainism and Hinduism were both supported by the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (753–982 CE). Notable examples of Jain temples are found at Ellora (Caves 30–34) and other locations. Sculptures & Art: Jain Tirthankaras and themes are intricately carved. Royal Support: Amoghavarsha I, a prominent monarch, supported Jainism and was a devout Jain. Ellora Caves: Rashtrakuta's mastery in architecture is on display in these Jain caves from the fifth to the eighth century. Cultural Harmony: Under the Rashtrakutas dominion, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism existed together.

**Buddhism:-**

Buddhism and the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (753–982 CE) had a complicated connection. The Deccan region saw a decline in Buddhism's impact. Early Rashtrakuta patronage is evident in Buddhist caves (1–12). Buddhism coexisted with Jainism and Hinduism, albeit with less royal support. Buddhist caves at Ellora include prayer halls and monasteries (viharas). Long-lasting devotion is seen in artistic representations of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas.



**Ellora Cave 7th-century Buddhist Chaitanya Hall, Ellora Caves in India, Buddhist rock cut cave temples at Ellora Caves- newworldencyclopedia**

Understanding, dedication, and artistic expression characterised the rich and inclusive religious culture of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty. They supported Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, expressing their faith via elaborate sculptures, elaborate temples, and literary works. Their era is a noteworthy example of harmony among faith, creativity, and political authority, as religion influenced not only spiritual life but also art, architecture, and government.

**Demonstration of Royal Power and Prestige:-  
Monumental Architecture as a Symbol of Imperial Glory:-**

Their magnificent architectural accomplishments were among the most remarkable displays of Rashtrakuta supremacy. The Kailasa Temple at Ellora, which Krishna I commissioned, is the best illustration. Beautifully carved from a single rock, it represents both divine authority and technological proficiency. Their dimensions and complexity reflect enormous resources, labour, and centralized authority. In addition to being a place of worship, the temple served as a political declaration of dominance, portraying the monarch as the earthly embodiment of heavenly authority.



**Kailasa Temple, at Ellora, India., Ellora- Historical architecture in India, Detail on stone at Ellora Caves, India- newworldencyclopedia**

**Royal Titles and Courtly Splendour:-**

Rashtrakuta emperors used Grand titles to highlight their authority and sovereignty; their absolute power was emphasised by titles such as "Parameshvara" (Supreme Lord) and "Maharajadhiraja". Researchers, poets, and ambassadors were drawn to their courts, which were hubs of luxury, diplomacy, and cultural sophistication. Amoghavarsha I and other kings were renowned for their academic and political ability.

**Patronage of Art, Literature, and Religion:-**

The dynasty used cultural patronage to demonstrate its eminence, enabling Sanskrit and Kannada literature, such as the Kavirajamarga. demonstrated tolerance and inclusivity by endorsing several religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Supported architects and artists, transforming their kingdom into a hub of artistic excellence.



**Old Kannada inscription dated Shaka 868 (c.944-45 AD) of Rashtrakuta empire King Krishna III.JPG - Wikimedia Commons, Rashtrakuta Dynasty - New World Encyclopaedia**

The Rashtrakuta dynasty used a combination of military prowess, imposing architecture, cultural patronage, and efficient governance to show off its royal authority and dignity. They became one of the most influential and powerful dynasties in early medieval India thanks to their accomplishments, particularly the magnificence of the Kailasa Temple, extensive territorial conquests, and the flourishing of the arts.

#### **Advancement of Artistic Excellence:-**

One of the most significant cultural accomplishments in early mediaeval India is the development of artistic quality during the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8th–10th century CE). Their great religious dedication and political authority are reflected in their support of sculpture, architecture, and the arts.

#### **Rock-Cut Architecture: The Pinnacle of Achievement:-**

The beautiful rock-cut temples of the Rashtrakutas, particularly at Ellora Caves, are their most famous feature. The most famous construction is the Kailasa Temple (Cave 16), which Krishna I ordered built. It is a monolithic building that demonstrates exceptional engineering skill, carved from a single rock. The temple represents Shiva's home, Mount Kailash. Scenes from epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata are depicted in intricate sculptures. This architectural achievement exhibits unparalleled planning, accuracy, and creative vision.



**Kailasa temple, Ellora caves, , the rock-cut monolithic temple and Rock cut sculpture in Ellora cave no. 16 (Indian rock-cut architecture - Wikipedia)**

#### **Sculpture: Dynamism, and Spirituality:-**

Rashtrakuta sculpture is praised for its exquisite details and communication. Dynamic movement is depicted in sculptures, such as Ravana shaking Mount Kailasa. Carved representations of gods, goddesses, and celestial entities with realistic dimensions and emotions. Diverse creative themes resulted from the dynasty's sponsorship of other religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. In terms of the opulence of Hindu art, the Jain caves at Ellora exhibit a tasteful beauty and austerity.



Ravana shaking mount Kailash, Ellora, Parvati sculpture - Exterior of the Rameshwara cave, Ellora Caves Interiors Stone Sculptures of Jain(www.alamy.com/stock-photo/shiva-ellora-cave.html?sort By=relevant)

**Painting and Decorative Arts:-**

Painting and landscaping arts also flourished, despite fewer remnants remaining: the vibrant use of colour and narrative storytelling are suggested by traces of murals at Ellora. Temple interiors were enriched with decorative elements, including geometric and floral patterns and mythological iconography. Craftspeople reinforced religious concepts by fusing symbolic meaning with aesthetic beauty.



Patrons of Art and Architecture Clio's Chronicles, Remains ceiling painting of Nymphs dancing, mahamandapa, Ellora Caves, Intricate carving of Hindu deity at Hindu temple (Rashtrakuta Empire - Wikipedia) Through their elaborate ornamental arts, expressive sculpture, and gigantic architecture, the Rashtrakutas brought Indian art to unprecedented heights. Their works, particularly at Ellora, are timeless representations of creative greatness, technical mastery, and religious devotion, solidifying their status as the greatest art patrons in Indian history.

**Architectural Innovation :-**

The majority of the most inventive temple builders in early mediaeval India were the Rashtrakutas (8th–10th century CE). Particularly in the Deccan region, their architecture is notable for its mastery of rock-cut techniques, creative ambition, and engineering prowess.

- Monolithic rock-cut architecture, or buildings carved from a single, enormous rock, was developed by the Rashtrakutas. The Kailasa Temple at Ellora Caves is the most famous example. Artists removed thousands of tonnes of rock by excavating downward rather than building upward. Because errors could not be fixed, careful planning was necessary. One of the biggest single-stone carvings in the world was created using this process.
- The architecture of the Rashtrakutas combines elements of Pyramidal towers, or vimanas, which are characteristic of Dravidian (South Indian) architecture. Curvilinear shikharas are Nagara (North Indian) elements. A pan-Indian architectural vocabulary emerged from this blending. Their temples often feature multi-level designs, symmetry, and balance.



Elora complex is unique in artistic creation and technological development, Kailasa Temple, Ellora Caves Rock-Cut Architectural Masterpiece, Architecture and major sites of World Heritage - Connect Civils (Rashtrakuta Empire - Wikipedia)

The Rashtrakutas' innovative architecture is an amazing combination of creative vision, engineering prowess, and religious expression. Rock-cut temple construction gave way to more structurally intricate temple architecture during this time, as evidenced by works such as the Kailasa Temple at Ellora, which demonstrated unmatched accuracy in monolithic excavation. The Rashtrakutas created their own unique style, marked by elaborate carvings, grand scale, and harmonious proportions, while skilfully incorporating elements from earlier traditions such as the Pallavas and Chalukyas. A wide variety of architectural forms and iconography resulted from their support of several religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. In conclusion, Rashtrakuta architecture is regarded as one of the finest accomplishments in Indian art and architecture, a monument to their technological inventiveness and cultural inclusiveness. It left a legacy that impacted later South Indian temple design.

**Cultural Integration and Legacy:-**

An artistic and culturally cohesive Indian subcontinent was shaped in large part by the Rashtrakuta Dynasty (8th–10th century CE). Their Deccan-centered authority served as a link between northern and southern customs, leaving an enduring effect in several areas:

**Cultural Integration:-**

The Rashtrakutas' ability to combine various cultural elements was one of their defining characteristics: they were devout followers of Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism. Monuments like the Ellora Caves, where various religions coexist within a single structure, demonstrate this inclusivity. They supported Kannada and Sanskrit, fostering regional literary development. This synthesis is exemplified by works such as Kavirajamarga. Their empire's location in the Deccan facilitated trade, intellectual exchange, and the spread of culture between northern and southern India. Their courts promoted a cosmopolitan culture by welcoming poets, academics, and artists from diverse cultures.



Carving in Kailasa Temple, at Ellora cave and Rashtrakuta Dynasty and - World History Encyclopaedia

**Legacy:-**

The Rashtrakutas left a significant and legacy: Krishna I commissioned the Kailasa Temple at Ellora, a monument to their engineering prowess and a wonder of massive rock-cut architecture. Generations of authors and academics were influenced by their patronage, which enhanced Kannada and Sanskrit literature. India's active trade networks strengthened cultural and economic connections with regions such as the Arab world. Later, the Deccan kingdoms were impacted by their form of government, which helped to maintain political stability in the immediate vicinity.



Kailasa Temple, Ellora- The Ancient rock-cut temple, Mintage WorldGold coin of Rashtrakuta dynasty , Dakkhni language defines cultural intimacy and regional belonging, Khidki (World History Encyclopaedia)

**Conclusion:-**

The art and architecture of the Rashtrakuta Dynasty showcase an amazing fusion of technical proficiency, religious dedication, and inventiveness. Their contributions, which represent both local customs and wider cultural influences, rank among the best in early mediaeval Indian history. The Rashtrakutas supported Buddhism, Jainism, and Hinduism, as seen by the variety of their sculptures and architectural structures. The rock-cut Kailasa temple at the Ellora Caves, its most famous legacy, was carved entirely from a single rock and represents unmatched technical mastery and artistic brilliance. These monuments exhibit sophisticated planning and organisational skills in furtherance of visual brilliance. Elaborate carvings, harmonious proportions, and dynamic expressions are characteristic of Rashtrakuta art, demonstrating both creative inventiveness and spiritual profundity. The development of Dravidian temple architecture was greatly aided by its architectural style, which influenced succeeding dynasties. Every aspect considered, the Rashtrakuta Dynasty left behind a cultural heritage that is still admired today. In addition to being historical accomplishments, their artwork and architecture serve as timeless representations of India's many cultures and rich cultural legacy. As evidence of the dynasty's important contributions to India's cultural and historical landscape, the buildings and artistic expressions from this era continue to arouse admiration and research. The Rashtrakuta era is a striking illustration of how architecture can capture the intricacies of spirituality, artistic expression, and technical innovation, influencing the region's cultural identity and leaving a lasting mark on Indian civilization's heritage.

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