

This particular period, that is the third quarter of the 1st Cent. B. C., when the emperor Satakarni II of the Satavahana dynasty was ruling over a major part of the country in the Deccan and Central India, was a formative period in the history of India. The powerful Satavahana monarch had then consolidated his position and was the only supreme ruler who had no rivals to that claim. The foreign rulers whose inroads in the country had disturbed the social life of the people were relegated to subsidiary positions. It was a period of considerable political peace, which, coupled with economic prosperity, inspired the artistic genius of the people and it is only such an era of affluence which makes it possible to create such architectural edifices like the one at Sanchi. The Sanchi reliefs therefore afford us a glimpse of life of the affluent generation which lived during the third quarter of 1st Cent. B. C.¹

Architecture

The immensely large number of temples and monastic establishments that have survived in the course of centuries no doubt conveys us a fairly good idea of the religious architecture of our ancient past. But unfortunately our knowledge of our ancient religious architecture is not matched by that of secular architecture. Literary references to the latter are too many to detail, but we do not have actual remains to compare them with literary descriptions. Mention must, however, be made of the architectural remains that have been brought to light in the course of such large-scale excavations as those at Taxila. But many more sites should be excavated so that we can have sufficient data at our disposal to formulate a clear idea of our ancient secular architecture. This is all the more necessary in order to corroborate it by literary references and descriptions of foreigners.

The Sanchi reliefs contain a good number of representations of a variety of dwellings ranging from royal palaces to humble huts and religious establishments as well and herein we can study a variety of details of the architectural creations of the ancient Indian artisan.

(1) The life depicted in the reliefs cannot strictly be taken to be of the people of Central India for the simple reason that the artists, while executing the reliefs, must have been guided by certain conventions and traditions as well.