

Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation
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Module – 02
Chronological Journey
Lecture: W1 – L2

Welcome viewers to the MOOC online course on Introducing Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the second module of the first section. We have already studied the first module, which dealt on the geographical expanse of India in the context of Indian art and culture. In this module we shall be looking at another very important aspect of studying Indian art that is chronology so before we move on, I would like to very briefly discuss a very interesting problem of dating of Indian art objects. From Mughal period onwards we too have a huge number of art works which can be created very securely. Because of very strong historical evidences, because of very convincing historical and archaeological evidences, dating can be done very convincingly with regard to certain art objects.

Prior to Mughal period we have come across various monuments, temple structures, art objects like sculptures and paintings, which are a kind of enigma for art historians, because often or more often than then not most of this art objects do not carry any date along with them. They are not dated works of art and that is pretty normal, because in ancient art who would after finishing their art work, put a date on their art work or behind the sculptures or beneath the painting.

For example, go to Ajanta cave complex located in Maharashtra. Try to find out at least one date from the entire range of Ajanta paintings. You would not get a single point. It is such a rich repository of paintings and sculptures. Yet there is not a single panel painting or sculpture which has a date inscribed on it. Go to Mahabalipuram; go to Konark sun temple at Orissa, go to Khajuraho, Ellora. None of this very famous monuments temples cave architectures are none of this very well-known sculptures and paintings actually have dates inscribed on their art work so it is up to the art historians to find out the date so dating is a big issue. You need to have enough archeological and historical evidences and supporting evidences in order to ascertain a date. Beside this, there is also this issue of chronology. Because we know Indian art has developed over a period of time, passing

through a chronological range of let us, say dynasties periods various faces hence, almost the way we tried to tune ourselves in our first lecture, to be able to locate art work in proper location.

Similarly, we need to tune ourselves to locate art works in their proper time period. Even if we cannot do it, but we should create an awareness so that the moment we know the date of a certain period or a certain work of art. For example, the moment you come to know that the most of the very famous Ajanta paintings were painted around 5th century AD, this time itself should ring a bell. It should tell you a lot about the cultural and historical context. So like the geographical expanse, the chronology of Indian art too has a checked history enrich with diversity. The main stream Indian art history is full of different dynasties and this is what makes a chronology very important.

And the different dynasties are ruled by different kings with different mind sets and therefore, because of their differences in the prior case, cultural scenarios of also changed along with the chronology, because the chronology changed along with the dynastic changes. And let me tell you at this time, that is mainstream history of Indian art is often known as the dynastic history of Indian art. Because each of this very famous periods in Indian art history whether it is Shringan art, or Mauryan art, or Guptha art. They all belong to any one particular dynasty. It means each of these periods were actually patronized by a particular ruling class.

In most of these cases the periodical changes in the ruling class had a visible influence on the art of the given time. In other words, the specific dynasties or rulers while patronizing the art of their period also influenced the form and content of the art, be it sculptures, architecture, painting, decorative art or functional art. And this is one reason one of the very important reasons, why we should have a fairly good knowledge about the chronology. Because chronology is not simply about dating, it is not simply about different time periods, because time periods immediately imply a different cultural political or a ruling system. Hence we can assume that a different ruling system a different dynastic period may have some kind of influence of the art that it has produced.

So, that is why ancient and medieval art of India is often called the dynastic art of India. Of course, that does not mean that the rulers and the dynasties completely controlled art. Some times in certain cases, we are seen the rulers who are also known as patrons of art,

control the art more directly. For example, king Ashoka, he did control the art of his Mauryan period more directly than many others who were patrons, but then let or allow they did allow their artists to work freely and independently. The society and its aspirations also had a significant role to play along with the other factors like religion and individual artistic talents and the available technology of art production.

Apart from the geographical diversity, which we had already discussed in the first module, the chronological changes also led to a culture of India that is not only one of the oldest in the world, but also rich and diverse in its artistic productions. That is a very good positive impact of chronology on the history of Indian art. Because of the dynastic changes that kept happening in Indian chronology, we are fortunate that we get different kinds of art works in terms of their style, in terms of their features, and in terms of their content. For example, the Shunga rulers of Sunga dynasty, they were great patrons of Buddhism right. The Sunga dynasty was followed by Kushana dynasty. There were also great patrons of Buddhism.

So, most of the art works sculptures that we get from these two periods happen to be Buddhist sculptures; pertaining to Buddhist etiology, Buddhist philosophy and Buddhist iconography. Now we know that Kushana period was followed by Gupta period. The Gupta kings initially also patronized Buddhism hence we do have some very famous so wonderful sculptures of Buddha and Bodhisattva made in Mathura and Sarnath from Gupta period, but at the same time, gradually the Gupta rulers also began to patronize the Brahmanical religion which is also known as the Hindu religion. As a result, from Gupta period, we also get to say some beautiful sculptures pertaining to or belonging to the Brahmanical religion, some wonderful architectural pieces directly belonging to the Hindu religion.

Now, this could not have happened, if the Gupta king or the Gupta kings did not patronize Hinduism. So patronization and hence chronology in larger sense of the term appears to be very important in shaping the art of a certain period.

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And if you look at the beginning of Indian chronology, we can always say safely that, let us begin the Indian art chronology, not from Indus valley civilization, but from the rock shelters of Bhimbetka which has been dated safely between 9,000 and 7,000 BC. It is possible let us keep all the options open. It is possible that a few years down the line somebody discovers another pre historic sight which is even earlier even more ancient than this one.

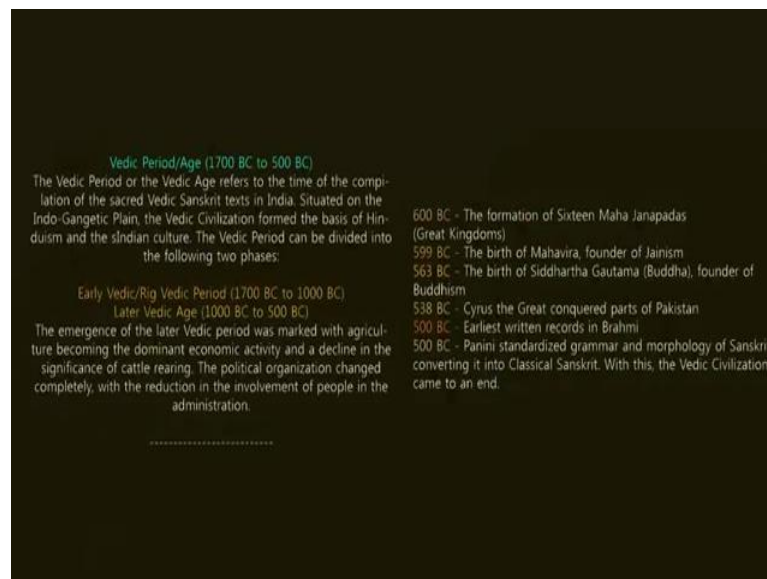
So, our chronology will keep expanding. This is to say, that chronology is not given, chronology is gradually discovered. As we keep researching, as we keep studying Indian art our chronology also keeps expanding. Just one example, for a long time we knew that after the prehistoric period that is the Bhimbetka phase of 10,000, 9,000 BC, the first important civilization that happen to flourish in the Indian subcontinent was Indus valley civilization which started around 3000 BC and went on till 1700 BC, but it was only very recently let say 30-40 years back, that another culture very close in character and also in terms of its artistic products to Indus valley civilization, even very close geographically is Mehrgarh culture, which flourished between 7,000 BC and 3,330 BC. And the moment Mehrgarh culture was discovered our chronology expanded.

So, now we cannot say that the earliest civilization in the Indian sub-continent is Indus valley civilization. We have to had; we have to include Mehrgarh culture as well. And the moment we add Mehrgarh culture, then coming to our previous module on

geographical expansion, we need to say that even geographical we need to expand our history of Indian art. Why? Mehrgarh culture flourished not within present India, not even within Pakistan, where Mohenjo-Daro culture flourished, but it flourished further north west in the present Afghanistan, along the river of Baluchistan, in the along the river of Bolan in Baluchistan, this particular civilization flourished.

So, as our chronology kept expanding, due to the discoveries of new sides, our geographical area of Indian art also keeps expanding correspondingly. Now Indian culture, because of it is chronological variety was molded throughout the various eras of history, because chronology can be divided into various eras. As well as the early parties concerned it is still simpler we can say that it be begins with Bhimbetka, followed by Mehrgarh culture, followed by Indus valley civilization. If you want to go into the details we can even divide Indus valley civilization in to early Harappan, mature Harappan, so and so forth.

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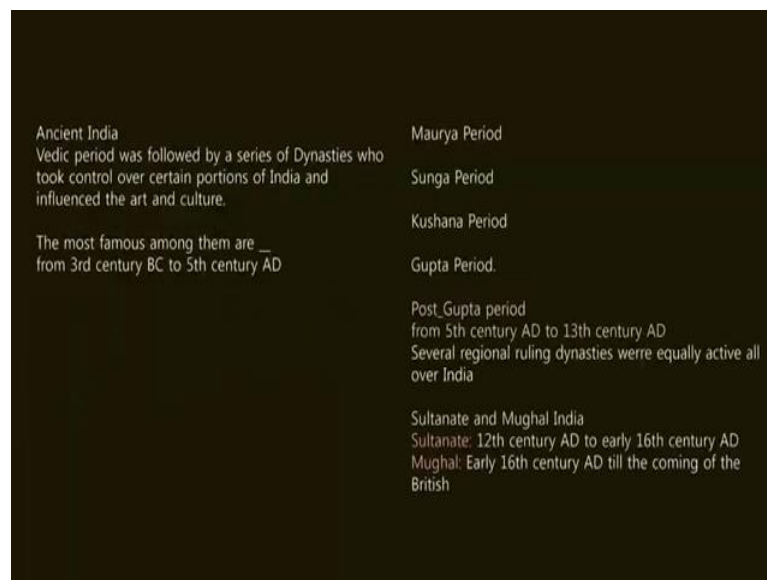


Then, we come across another culturally very rich phase in Indian history known as the Vedic period which started around 1700 BC and went up to 500 BC. Though this Vedic period is not very significant in terms of it is art productions, but it did shape the Indian culture very significantly, and during this time though we have not come across much examples of sculptures, not at all any example of painting, but we have come across various other functional objects like potteries, even architectural veins from this period.

Vedic period too can be divided in to certain subdivisions like early Vedic, later Vedic etcetera. Then this part of chronology was followed by very significant dates and times, where some development, very important developments within the political situation of India took place.

For examples, 600 BC around 600 BC, the formation of 16 Maha Janapadas; it is important because now India moved away from a larger civilizational process to smaller kingdoms, smaller principalities, smaller areas under the control of individual kings and monarchs. So this part is very important as for as the later developments of Indian art history is concerned.

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Now, ancient India, as it is known within the context of Indian art history, can also have subdivisions like Mauryan period, Sunga period, Kushana period, Guptha period. These four periods have very strong and very clear time period. Deliberately I have not kept the time periods visible in my note and I want you to get the time periods and put them along, and please find out yourself, what was the Mauryan time period followed by the Sunga Kushana and the Guptha period.

After Guptha period again, we come across another very strange situation in Indian chronology, because we cannot very specifically say an or name any particular period. So if you ask me that Guptha period is followed by which period, I will not have any one singular answer. I will have to say it is a post Guptha period, because during this phase

you come across not one powerful singular authority or dynasty, but you come across several authorities, several political ruling classes ruling in different regions all over India. And that is why we come across these names of Chalukyan then Chandalas then Ganga dynasty Rashtrakutas so and so forth.

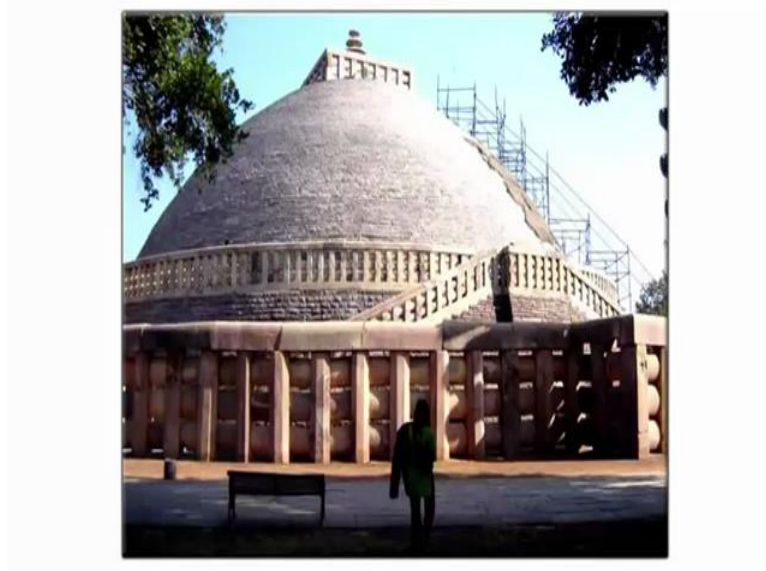
Another major breakthrough that appeared in the chronology of Indian art is a Sultanate and the Mughal period. Roughly 12th century AD is the beginning of the sultanate period. And this is a time when you get to see very different kinds of buildings and paintings are coming up. Sultanate period was followed by the Mughal period, which started around 16th century and it was pretty active and very powerful till the advent of the British. And from the British period it is a different history all together, which we shall study when we will look at the modern art in the later module.

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So, coming back to images, once again instead of going to the location, now let us look at the chronology. That is the various time periods each of these artworks belong to originally. For example, you have already seen this image in the first module very famous priest head which belongs to the Harappan culture; hence it should be in between 3000 and 1500 BC.

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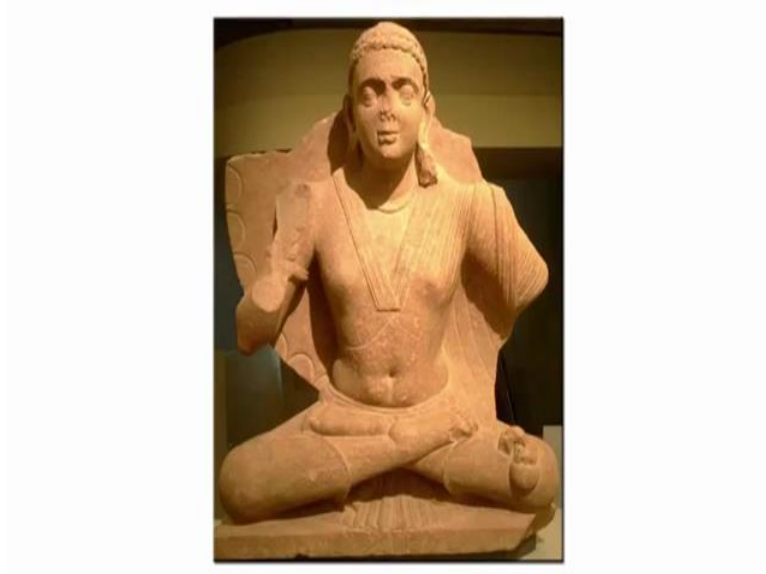
This famous monument known as the Sanchi Stupa belongs to the Sunga dynasty. And built around first century AD. So different time brackets, not only suggest different cultures and different ruling classes, but different time brackets also suggest different artworks in character.

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Followed by, again this famous sculpture of Buddhishatha from Gandara which belongs to the Kushana period.

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Which followed the Sunga period? And as I have already discussed from the same Kushana period we get another sculpture of Buddha chronologically they belong to the same time bracket, but location-ally they belong to three different cultures. Whereas the earlier one was from Gandara this one is from Mathura. This is from Mahabalipuram.

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Slightly later in terms of chronology, because this belongs to 7th century AD, but not very far away from the Gupta time period which flourished in 5th century AD. So

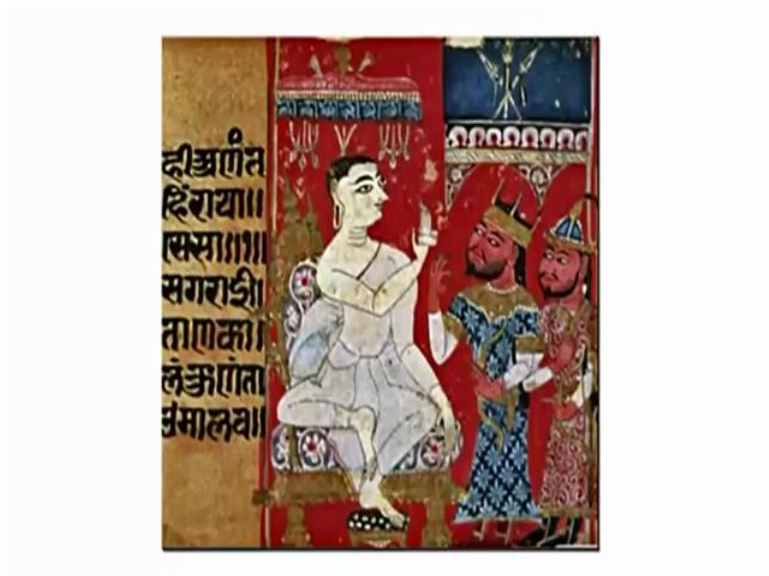
within 200 years, in a different location down south we get to say the emergence of another brilliant culture which was ruled by the Pallava dynasty.

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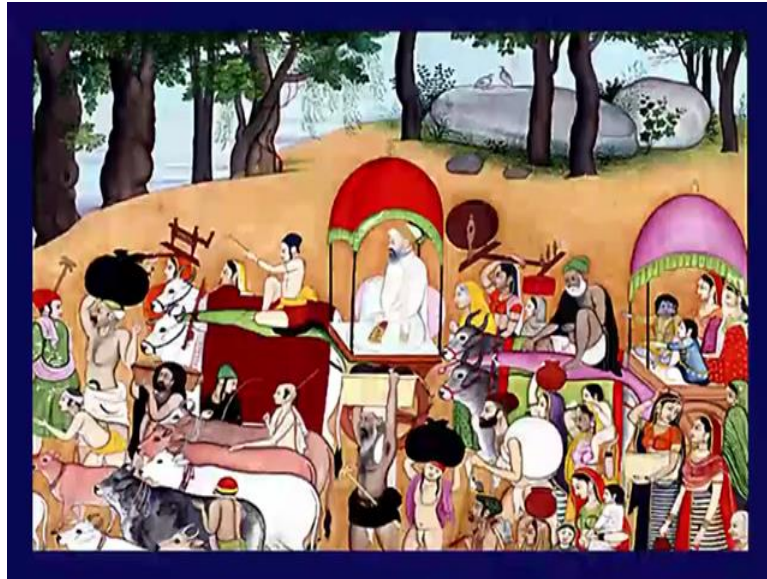
This piece of (Refer Time 21:08) sculpture is from the sun temple Konark, Orissa. Which are roughly around 11 to 12th century AD?

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Then we can briefly also look at a few examples of painting. Just to get an idea of the chronology of various specimens of Indian art. For example, this manuscript painting belonging to the Jain religion is from 14th century AD.

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Compare to this one, which is the Rajput painting belonging to the Himachal Pradesh region, and this was painted around 17 century or maybe early 18 century AD.

So, the chronological spread, even when you look at some random specimens from Indian art, you get to see a chronological spread like the way you get to see a geographical spread.

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Now, this geographical spread and the chronological spread really help us to see Indian art not as a monolithic history, but as a history which is very colorful, which is full of

diversity and full of multiplicity. For example, after having seen quite a few examples of Buddhist art and a couple of examples from Hindu art and Jain art in the same Indian land we also come across something like this the famous Taj Mahal. This was built during the time of Shah Jahan as you all know who was one of the greatest Mughal kings? So not only Taj Mahal reflects a different architectural concept a different cultural concept, but it also reflects a different dynastic culture. And this is what I want you, I want to draw your attention to because chronology is not just memorizing dates or time brackets.

The moment you feel yourself comfortable with chronology, you know that now will be able to have an immediate grasp over the cultural conversation of the chronology. So chronology or time periods, immediately imply certain cultural conversation, certain contextual suggestions, which help us to understand and appreciate Indian art.

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Now, to wind up the chronological discussion, let me also tell you there is another very big section a huge aspect of Indian art which is beyond chronology which can be termed as timeless art or timeless art traditions. I know some of you have already guessed we are talking about the long and continuous indigenous tradition of Indian folk art.

Whereas, when you look at Buddhist sculptures from Gupta period, immediately you can say you can look at this is from Gupta period, but you when you look at, when you look at plenty of terracotta toys dolls, wall paintings, floor paintings happening in the

different parts of India you can of course, say that this floor decoration or this mandala is from Rajasthan, this Kolam from south India, this Alpona is from Bengal, but these artworks do not have anything very specific about their time origin. I mean that Alpona that you are doing today may have a strong tradition so strong that we can safely assume that a similar Alpona is going on as a part of your tradition maybe for last 1000-2000 years. Hence this whole tradition of indigenous folk art is beyond chronology. They are timeless.

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Now, let us quickly look at some of these images. For example, this very simple toy of a mother and child; we do really need to know when this particular toy was made. Because this could be made now, this could be made 10 years back; this could be made even 2000 years back. Because this particular form and the culture that produces it they do not adhere to any specific dynasty, hence they do not adhere or follow any specific time bracket. Look at any of this folk toys or dolls they will all have the same character of being timeless.

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Look at this floor decorations being done by a woman in a village.

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Maybe similar floor decorations were there even 500 or 1000 year back. So some of this specimens and there are many such specimens from Bengal from other parts of India, this part of painting from Bengal or the floor decorations, they all have the same character that they do not confirm to any particular time bracket.

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So to wind up I can give you one brilliant example of a terracotta toy. Which is of course, fairly contemporary maybe made some 100 years back. But look at this one, which is pretty similar to the earlier one whereas, the first one is a 19th century terracotta toy, the second one is a third century BC. It is very old this almost belongs to Harappan period.

So because it is from Harappan period we can still ascertain a particular time period, but what about this one these kinds of terracotta toys. These kinds of specimens coming from

our folk traditions, they do not belong to any particular time period. Hence they are timeless.

Thank you.