

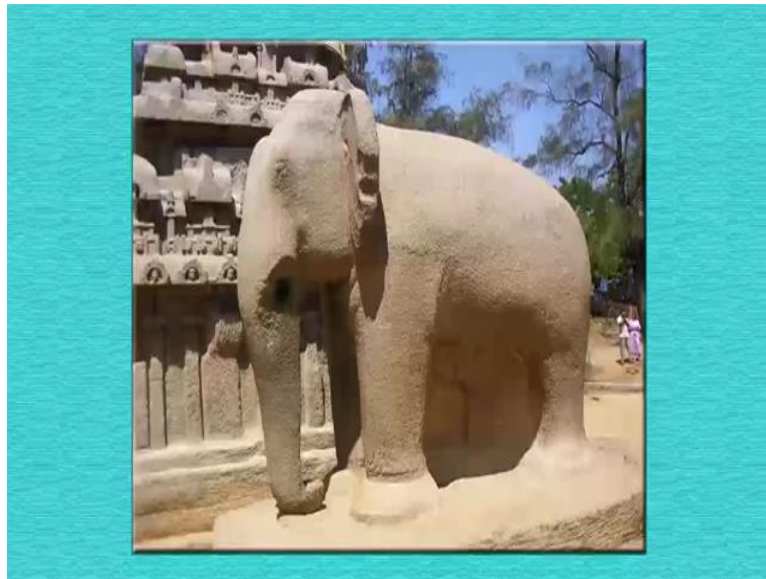
Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation
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Module – 04
Variations in Indian Sculpture
Lecture: W1 – L4

Welcome viewers to MOOCs online course on introduction to Indian art and appreciation. And this is the fourth module of the first section known as introducing Indian art and this particular module is on the variations of Indian sculptures. And the art of sculpture is one of the most highly respected medium for artists, and it has been widely practiced not only in India, but throughout the sub-continent another part of Asia in Europe in south East Asia almost every part of the world. In Indian art one of the most striking features about art sculptures is that you find them in different kinds of materials. You find them in stone, you find Indian sculptures in bronze, and you find Indian sculptures in clay, known as terracotta and also different kinds of other less permanent and perishable materials. Particularly when you are looking at the folk art you find artists are using more impermanent more ephemeral materials.

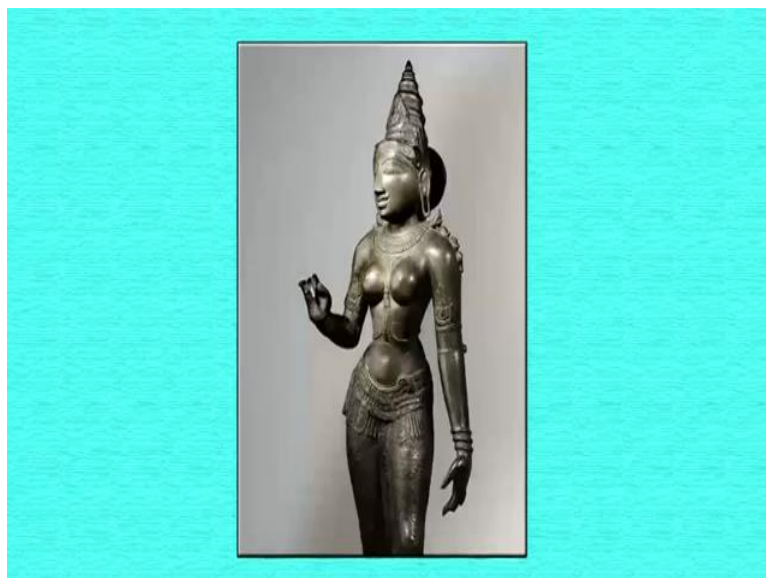
But the main stream of Indian art is full of sculptures made in stone, metal that is bronze, and of course, terracotta. Yes, wood is another medium which is not so profusely used in India as much as it is used in let us say Japan, but still you do come across some sculptures in wood too.

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So, just begin our discussion today, let us look at a couple of examples just to indicate the range of materials used to make Indian sculpture. This first image of an elephant is made out of a solid stone. So you have a solid block of stone and then you have a sculpture is carving out a huge elephant out of that. And as you know that carving is a negative technique, it is not an additive technique. The moment you scoop out chisel out something out of a block of stone, you cannot put it back so the carver has to be really very sure very certain of the image that he is trying to arrive at.

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The next one is another example a beautiful example of a sculpture made in bronze which not only requires technical skill, but it also requires technological knowhow, whereas for a stone carver the relationship is between the stone and the carving.

As far as a bronze sculpture is concerned in between the sculpture and the bronze image is involving a huge technological process of bronze casting. And we shall soon see that right from the beginning of Indian civilization or Indian art history, that is once again Indus valley civilization, we see that people are quite adept at and quite efficient in making sculptures in bronze which implies that they knew how to cast images in metal which is an incredible feat once again.

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And of course, terracotta, India is a land of clay and hence artists have liberally used clay in order to make clay sculptures, but clay something that is not only malleable, but very vulnerable. So you need to put the clay sculptures in fire. So you need skill, you need furnaces; you need to make the clay sculptures turn into terracotta sculptures. And this art of terracotta seems to be quite a familiar and a well-known art or a tradition practiced by Indian artists once again right from the beginning that is Indus valley civilization.

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Then our next interest would be to know about the locations of the Indian sculptures. Where do you find this Indian sculptures? Of course, you find independence sculptures like for example, the image of a Buddha or the image of Nataraja or the image of a Ganesh or the image of a king and his stone so and so forth. But a huge amount of Indian sculptures is found on or integrated with the architecture. So in order to understand in order to appreciate Indian sculpture, we always need to at least know and also feel how sculpture and architecture work together hand in hand.

In a number of cases throughout India, we see that architecture would have looked incomplete if there was no sculpture and sculpture would have had no place if there was no architecture. So this very integrated relationship between architecture and sculpture is one very crucial aspect in order to appreciate and understand and even enjoy Indian art. So this image for example, conveys the message that, right on the top of structural temple architecture there are numerable sculptures. Sometimes this sculptures are carved right on the wall of the temple architectures or sometimes they are built or made separately and later on they are placed and they are put together on the wall of the architecture.

Whatever might be the process; this is true that there is hardly any one example of Indian architectural I am talking about mostly the temple architectures without any sculpture. It is almost impossible to find the single example of Indian architecture without sculpture.

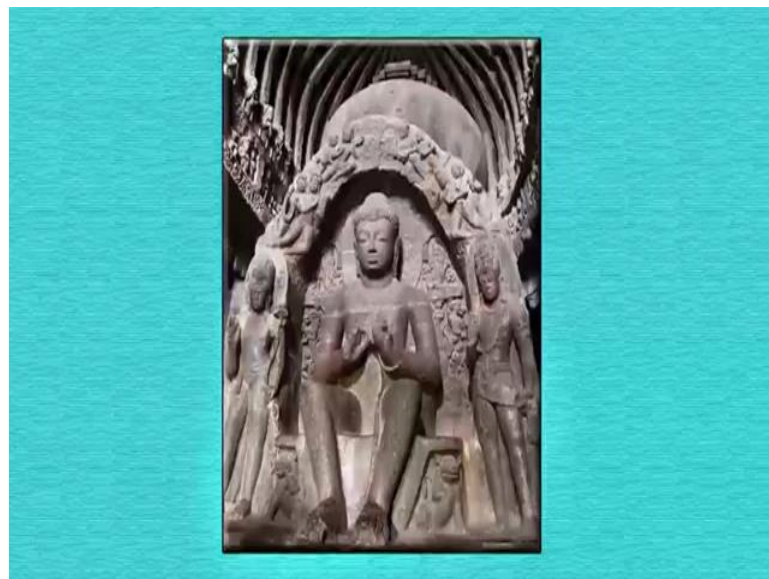
So once again this integrated relationship. This unaskable relationship between sculpture and architecture is worth studying.

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Apart from sculptures finding their places on temples you also find lot of sculptures as a part of architectural elements. For example, pillar or as a part of an architectural bracket, or maybe at the corner of an architectural high up almost near the pinnacle.

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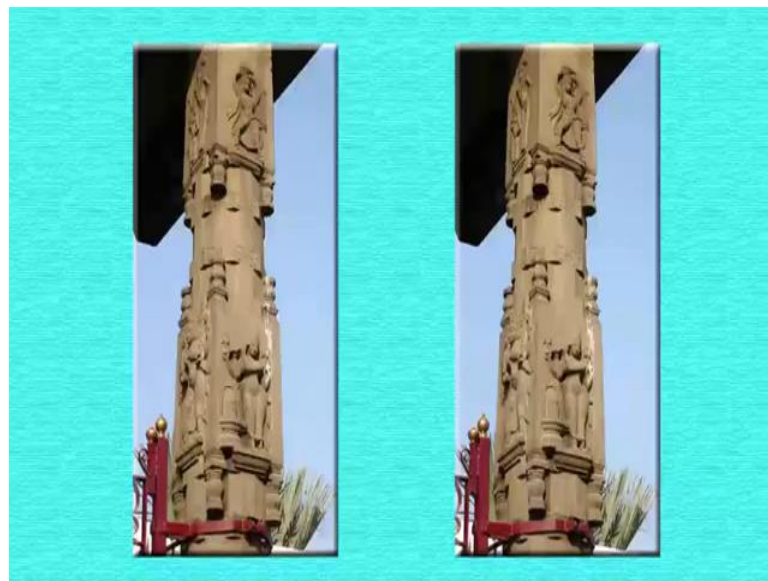


You find sculptures not only on the wall of the architectures or around the pillar, but also inside the architecture for example, this one. This is an example of a sculpture an image

of a Buddha made in stone which is part of the cave in which it is located. In fact, it not has been made or carved separately and put.

This particular image of Buddha was carved out simultaneously when the entire architecture was being carved out. So this is again gives us a clue that how the sculpture and the architect worked hand in hand, or a kind of with a mutual understanding between themselves, so that as the architectural process keeps happening the sculptural process also keep happening almost simultaneously.

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So, inside the cave architecture, the interior is again one place where you may find beautiful sculpture in Ajanta in Ellora in Badami so on and so forth. And as I have already mentioned this again one more example of sculptures existing on or around pillars. Pillar is again a very important part a very important member of architecture. So why they are doing it is also very important question.

And why one would not leave a pillar blank. Why it was essential for Indian architecture and sculptures to adorn, yes this is the word I am using to adorn, to ornate to decorate, perhaps this was the most basic reason to have sculptures on the pillars, on the ceilings, on the bracket, on the walls of the temples interior walls exterior walls.

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Now, apart from adorning the walls, decorating the walls and the pillars with sculpture, there might have been some religious and auspicious reasons as well which we shall discuss later on in some later modules.

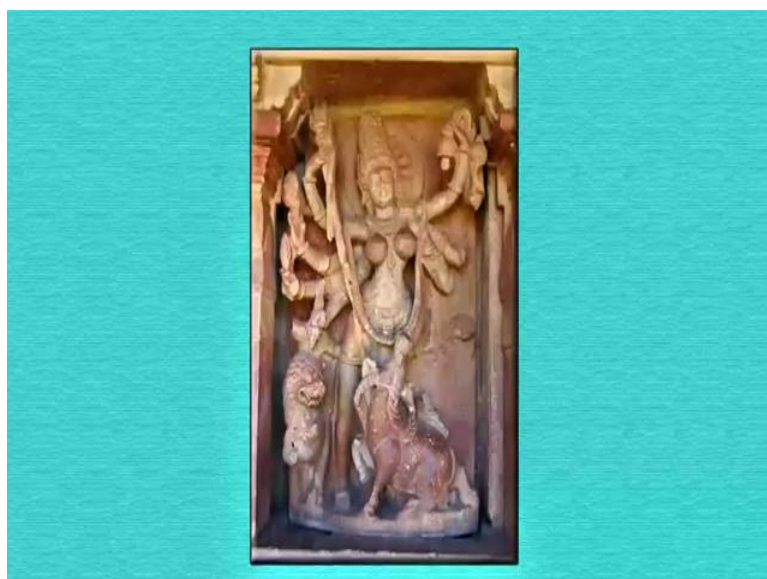
Often you find sculptures not like a free standing three dimensional sculpture, but what we call reliefs sculptures on the walls of the caves. For example, this one which is an image of a Varaha one of the incarnations of lord Vishnu is found on the wall, which is slightly interior not exactly the exterior wall of a cave at Udayagiri belonging to the Gupta period.

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You find a beautiful sculpture of lion, surmounting the Ashoka pillar of Mauryan period. So in the history of ancient India, everywhere any place that you looking at maybe a temple architecture or a cave architecture or a pillar the exterior the interior anywhere you can expect to find either a relief sculpture or a three dimensional sculpture or a free standing sculpture, either in the figurative form or in a simple decorative form. Sculpture thus has become essential along with the development of Indian architecture. They could not conceive architecture without sculpture. This is the fundamental truth about the relationship between architecture and sculpture in the history of traditional Indian art.

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Sculptures are even found particularly religious icons in the deep niches, in the deep recess of what we call Garbha Gruha in temples. This is one such example from the Durga temple located at Aihole in Karnataka.

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But it is not very unusual also to come across free standing sculptures like this one. From Chola period, the image of a Kalia Daman that is Krishna, we subdue getting Kalia the snake. And originally this might have been kept inside the temple, but this was not essentially or physically the part of the architecture. Hence we call this kind of sculptures we call free standing sculptures.

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Like architecture the legacy of Indian sculpture can also be traced back to Indus valley civilization. And right now I have, I have deliberately chosen four very different specimens of sculptures from Indus valley civilization. Of course, there are many you can find a lot of these images available online in books, but I have deliberately selected four images, four distinctly different images in order to convey one important aspect about Indian sculpture and this aspect is about the diversity of style.

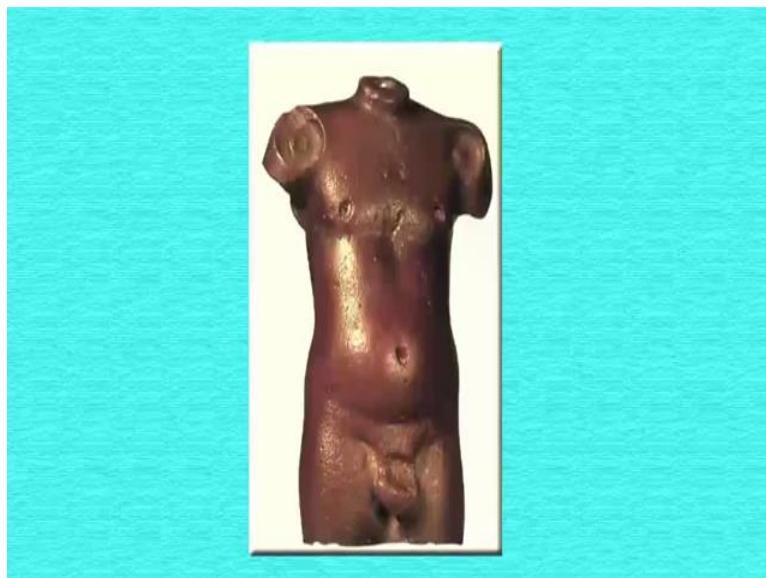
The diversity of style can be evident when one period or one dynastic period is replaced by the next one. Stylistic diversity can be found when sculptural changes overtake place whether due to regional differences or due to chronological differences. But Indus valley civilization in one example is one such example where, during one time span one singular time span you find sculptures carrying different styles. Look at this priest head it has certain stylistic features, which is of course, not natural. In the sense it is not very naturalistic. It follows certain natural characters of a man of figure of a human being, but the sculptor has taken certain liberty of doing things in its own way.

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Then compare this one with the next sculpture which is a dancing girl made in bronze again from Indus valley civilization. It is so slender so elongated the stylistically it becomes very different from the earlier one.

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Followed by next one which is surprisingly quite naturalistic and even realistic in the sense this kind of realistic forms usually we expect to be made by the famous Greek and Romans sculptor not Indus valley civilization artists, but they have made it.

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And the forth one is one terracotta figure which is pretty conceptual and very imaginative got hardly anything to do with the naturalistic form of a human being.

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So, in this next slide I have got all this images together in one frame. Just to give us this idea of diversity, particularly I am talking about stylistic diversity which is abundant in the history of Indians sculptures.

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Then of course, talking about the themes subject matters or content of Indians sculpture, now one very dominating and widely kind of evident subject matter of Indian sculpture is directly connected to religion.

So you have a huge number of Indian sculptures related to either Hinduism or Buddhism or Jainism so for and so forth. As a result, you have what we called iconic images available in sculptural form. For example, this one the image of a Ganesha made in stone.

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Image of a Nataraja made in bronze.

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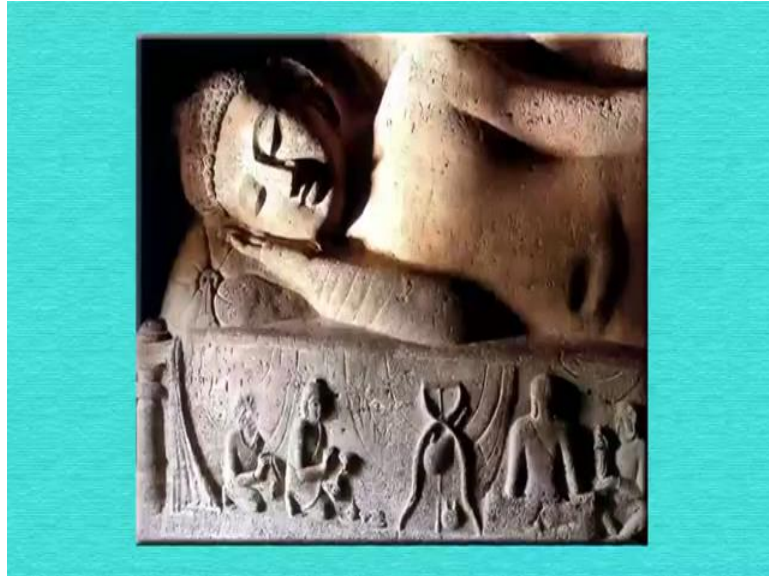


Image of Buddha; a reclining Buddha which is terminologically known as Mahaparinirvana, this sculpture is found in one of the Ajantha caves and; obviously, this is made in stone.

Now, all this images that we are looking at right now belong to one religious faith of the other. Hinduism Buddhism or Jainism, this one again is a very famous Varaha image; obviously, belonging to Brahmani-cal or Hindu faith.

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And it is belonging to Gupta period 5th century AD, because from this time a lot of mythological figures are coming into existence in terms of sculptural form.

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Then apart from religious imageries in Indian sculpture, you may also expect to see non-religious or let us say more directly images related to or representations of the royal life. Images of kings to put it very simply; so this is one of the earliest sculptures representing a king from Kushana period, and scholars have felt and they are convinced that this is an image of the famous king Kanishka of Kushana period. Though the head is not found, hence it is also in common parlance known as the headless sculpture of Kanishka.

Now, this image of Kanishka does not have anything to do with any religion person. It is a representation a royal and definitely glorified and hugely authoritative representation of a king who was as powerful as famous as any other king of the world.

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Similarly, you also have images like this which is famously known as Didarganj Yakshi. Though the word Yakshi refers to some kind of mythological or religious connection, but in this case though it is called Yakshi, because she has a whisk that she is holding in her right hand and her dress and revelry and everything seems to be representing not in mythological or religious figure, but a courtly female figure, belonging to the Mauryan period. This is one proposition.

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However, beside royal figures or figures representing characters from the royal sculpture, we also have a number of sculptural representations of common people and representations of daily life. One such example would be where you find a numerable example of sculptural representations of daily life is Konark sun temple. Look at the waistband. Look at the series of reliefs sculptures around the plinth of the sun temple at Konark. There is hardly any sculpture which is representing either the religious ideas or the royal figures they are all about common people.

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So, let us look at a few images which are representative of either the common life common people or the daily life of ancient India. Maybe they have a context either religious or royal context, the figures themselves are either musicians like this or this one they all from Konark.

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Or a lady with the peculiar posture, probably there is a thrown stuck underneath her foot and she is trying to extract it with the help of a young man. So this representation is abundant, there are plenty of such representations in Indian art in Indian sculpture and each having an individual and a very unique expression and movement and gestural language as well.

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And then of course, there are plenty of images of loving couples in Indian sculpture. You can find them in Khajuraho you can find them in Konark, you can find them in many

such places, where love between two human beings have been celebrated through very interesting sculptural representations.

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For example, this one this reminds us of the idea of a peeping tom; somebody peeping through the window. If you ask who is this guy? we do not have any answer. These kinds of figures do not have any classic any reference in any classical texts or any mythological text. You cannot really in other words identify this people. You can identify lord Kanishka, you can identify Nataraja, and you can identify various kinds of gods and goddesses from Hindu and Buddhists and Jain religion.

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But you cannot really identify this figures who represent the common life of India, the daily life India, like this one. Or for that matter this one. This beautiful figure standing on the balcony appears on one of the walls of the terracotta temples in Bengal.

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Or for that matter this one. Now how to explain these images in Indian art; no mythology can help you. No religious text can help you. These are virtually images of the contemporary life of India at that point of time when these sculptures were made.

Now, this brings us to a very interesting understanding, and it is very crucial for us to appreciate Indian art full heartedly. That is on the one hand it is true undoubtedly true that Indian art by enlarge is religious. Be Buddhist Hindu Jain no doubt about that, but on the other hand, within this religious context, within this religious frame work, Indian art has been able to keep ample space for the nonreligious, for the secular life, for the common life to enter and represent themselves.

And this has happened repeatedly. So we have often understood Indian art as a balanced view of life. Not just simply focusing on religion, but also paying attention to the daily life, to the common people, to the normal life, who do not have any religious sanction, you do not have any royal stagers, who do not have any grand status in society. Yet they find their representations within the range of Indian sculpture. And if you look at whenever you are visiting any particular art historical sight, whether it is Khajuraho, Konara, Kamalapuram, Kanchipuram, or any other sculptural temples any part of India look carefully. Do not just look at the most important and big images.

They are beautiful no doubt, but also look at the lesser images lesser in the sense of scale or size and maybe lesser also in the sense of where they are located within the architecture. And it is in these places that you find that the daily life gets represented. The common people get represented. And this accommodation Indian art being so accommodative. This makes Indian art very holistic. It is neither entirely religious nor entirely secular. It is a combination of both this aspect within one single unified world view.

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Apart from secular non-religious images or royal king images or; obviously, religious images we also come across plenty of what we call fanciful mythologically driven imaginative imageries in Indian art. And this is one such image where you are where you find yourself in ambivalent situation whether to call it a realistic image or a nonrealistic image, whether to call it a religious image or a secular image.

This is a fantasy image. Because despite the presence very strong presence of religion, secular life, royal life, within Indian art the presence of imagination, the presence of very imaginatively talented artists be it a painter or an architect or sculptor is undeniable Indian in art. And that is the reason why Indian art and this case Indian sculpture look so fascinating, because you find every kind of manifestation of life there.

Thank you.