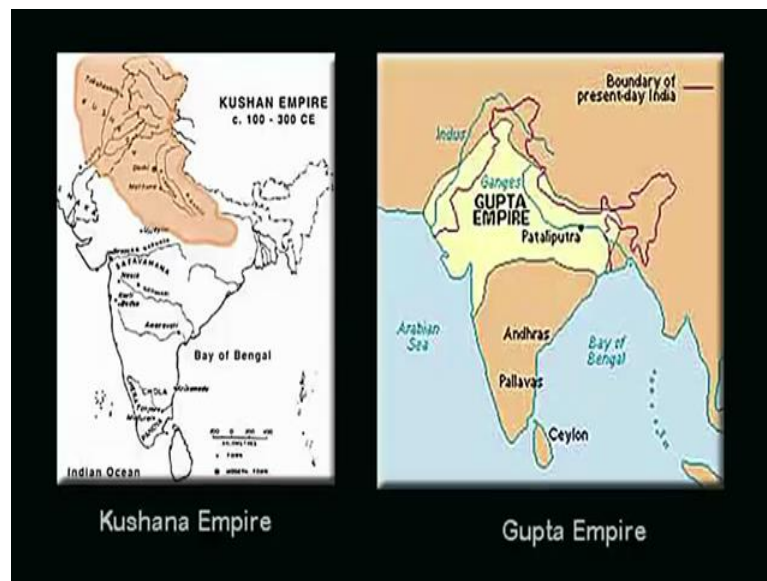


Introduction to Indian Art – An Appreciation
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Module – 04
Art of Royal Dynasty: Kushana & Gupta Period
Lecture: W2 - L4

Welcome viewers to MOOC online course on Introduction to Indian Art and Appreciation. This is the fourth module of the second week religious and cultural diversities and in this module, we will be looking at some of the famous sculptures belonging to the Kushana and Gupta period to mighty empires of ancient India and that is the reason why we have titled this particular module as art of the royal dynasty Kushana and Gupta period.

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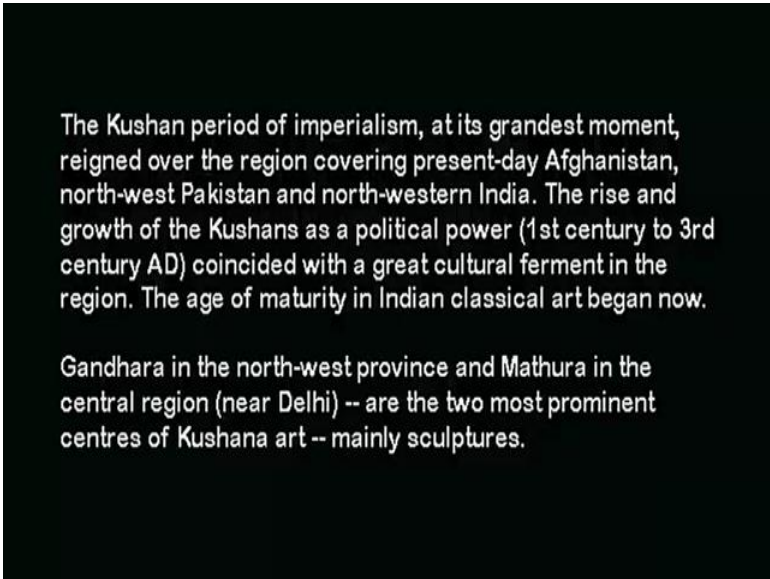


Look at the map look at the expansion of these two empires particularly the expansion of Kushana empire is very interesting because on the one hand it covers large part of the present up, particularly the western up and at the same time. It stretches up to North West crossing the north west of India and covering a large part of present Pakistan. So, it is not surprising that two very important centers of art from Kushana period are one Mathura that is located right at the heart of India and another is Gandhara which is located in present Pakistan, And the location of these two centers are extremely important because

these locations have a lot of bearings on the stylistic features of the sculptures these 2 sites produced.

On the one hand Gupta Empire is also pretty mighty and a big empire and which took control over a large part of northern and central India. But it more or less remains to within the present boundary of India. The Gupta empire consolidated itself into a very powerful empire and not only that when we look at the sculptures produced during the Gupta period we can see that how it beside consolidating its political power was also able to consolidate its aesthetic ideas of art and that is the reason why the art of Gupta period is also known as the classical art.

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The Kushan period of imperialism, at its grandest moment, reigned over the region covering present-day Afghanistan, north-west Pakistan and north-western India. The rise and growth of the Kushans as a political power (1st century to 3rd century AD) coincided with a great cultural ferment in the region. The age of maturity in Indian classical art began now.

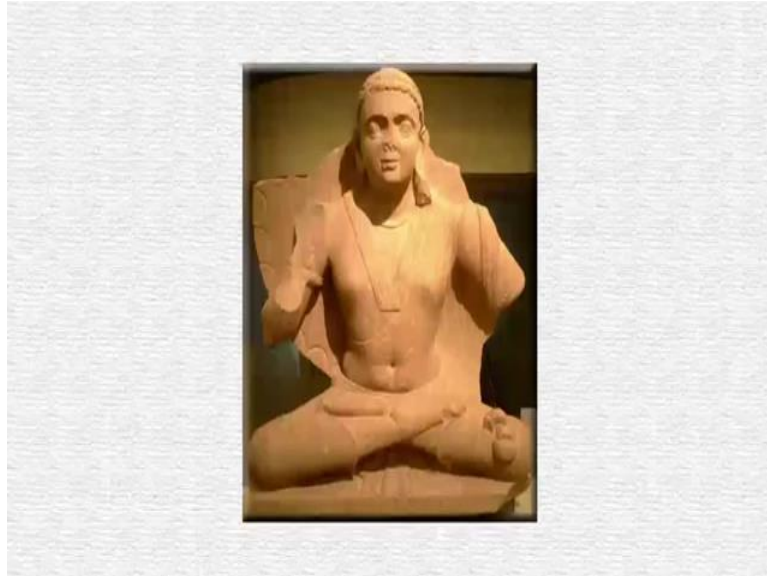
Gandhara in the north-west province and Mathura in the central region (near Delhi) -- are the two most prominent centres of Kushana art -- mainly sculptures.

Now, let us begin with the Kushana period. We all know that Kushana period of imperialism at its grandest moment reigned over the region covering the present day Afghanistan I have just told you the north west Pakistan to north western India. The rise and growth of the Kushana is a political power, which existed "Between" 1st century to 3rd century AD, coincided with the great cultural ferment in the region.

The age of maturity in Indian classical art begins now and it is going to cultivate during the Gupta period. So, you have Gandhara in the North West province and Mathura in the

central region near Delhi and these 2 sites are the two most important most prominent centers of Kushana art.

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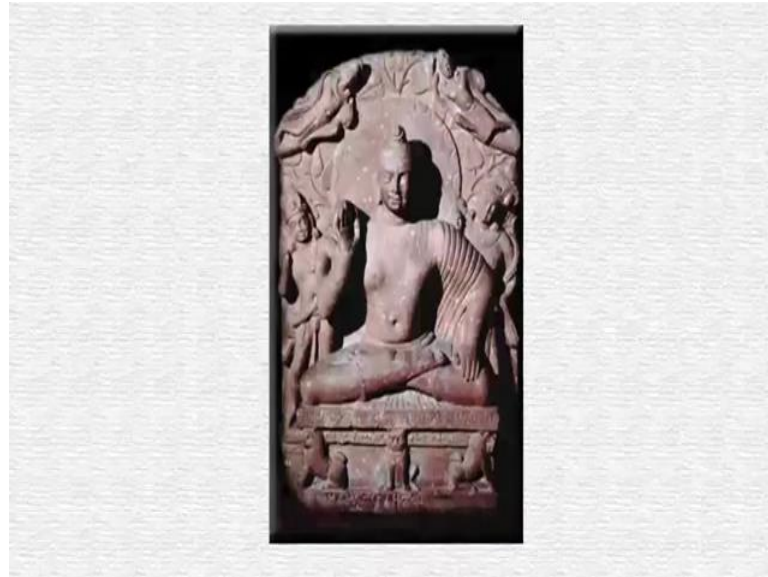
Mainly for sculptures not one or two, but these 2 sites have produced 100 of sculptures with immense amount of verity and of course, with kind of sculptural idea which did not exist before the Kushana period because if you remember like what we discussed in the last module most of the sculptures that we come across from Sanchi Bharhut or Amaravathi they were all pre dominantly relief sculptures.

But now in Kushana period and followed by the Gupta period we shall see of course, there are a plenty of relief sculptures, but we shall also see independent free standing three dimensional sculptures. As oppose to the relief sculptures which always need a background to hold the figures here you have independent sculptures which are also known as free standing sculptures.

Now, Mathura as one of the centers of Kushana period is famous for of course, its Buddha images, Budhishakti images and later on we shall see it is also well known for the images of the royal personalities I mean the Kushana kings. Now look at this Buddha image very strong in terms of its anatomy in terms of its physicality and at the same time

there is also an attempt at transparency particularly when you look at the (Refer Time: 05:32) when you look at the cloth that Buddha is having across his shoulder. So, there is a strange combination between a strong physicality of the body and a very transparent quality of the cloth that is attached to the body.

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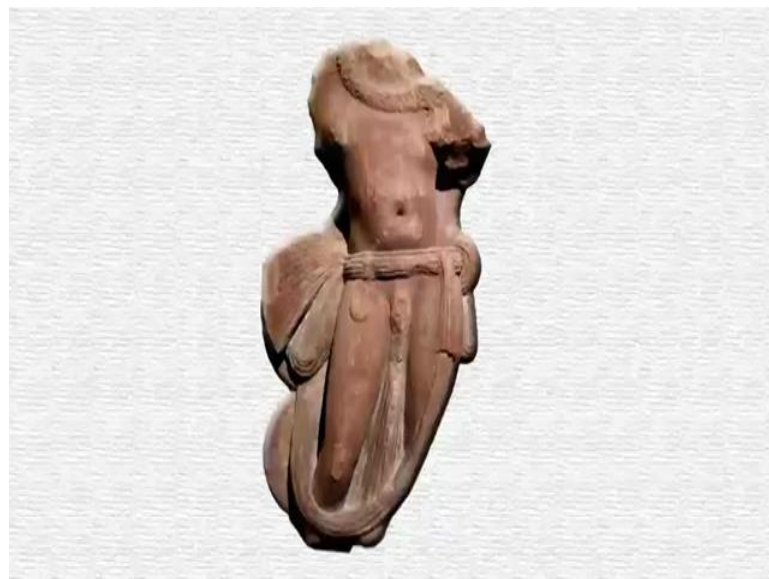
Along with that in other sculptures of Buddha where Buddha is in the posture of blessings or kind of what is known as Abhaya Mudra. That Buddha is assuring it is a gesture of assurance there you see that the entire body of the image of Buddha has also gained a spiritual quality do remember, that (Refer Time: 06:20) Amaravathi we have never come across a single image of Buddha in human form.

So, Kushana period is the first period in the history of Indian art which produces Buddha in the human form and there is a lot of responsibility in that. I mean how do you how to image Buddha how do you know; how he looked like do you have any reference. So, is your representation of Buddha very authentic? We really do not know nobody knew even Gandhara or Mathuras sculptures or sculptures from the Kushana period nobody knew how Buddha actually looked like.

So, they all had to imagine, but their imagination was partly based on the Buddhist texts

written Paali and not that these texts describe how Buddha looked like, but from these texts you may have an idea about the physicality of Buddha the physical features of Buddha and. Secondly, what guides you as an artist to image to imagine the figure of Buddha is not the text not a physical description, but something that is intangible something that is non physical in other words you need to as a sculpture you certainly need to feel he spiritual quality of Buddha.

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And. So, as an artist your intention is not only to get the physical proportions and (Refer Time: 07:55) need to be right, but also to bring the physical and a spiritual quality both at the same time in the same figure, we shall see more of that in the later slides.

Now, quickly a few images which represent not a spiritual Buddha, but a very strong and authoritative image of Kushana king like this one; sometimes it is difficult to know who that king is often it is difficult to make identification and hence there are assumptions. So, certain scholars assume that this should be one of this early Kushana kings some people have something else to say we are not going into that.

But even if you I do not tell you if in if you are I do not let you know that this image is the image of Kushana king still by looking at the gesture by looking at the body by looking at this 2 strong pair of shoes by looking at the way he is seated even he if he does not though he does not have any head at this as for as this sculpture is concerned, but still from the body and posture you can make out that this must be an also because he seated on a throne.

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Now, all these elements suggest very strongly suggest that this has to be a king followed by this very famous image famously known as the headless figure of king Kanishka again we do not have any final proof that this has to be the image of Kanishka, but again there are associated evidences there are clues which suggests that this is possible that this particular image of a king is the image of Kanishka and unfortunately like the previous one here too we do not have the head wish we the head was there and we could get an idea how Kanishka really looked like.

But look at the suite look at his posture look at the pair of very strong big shoes. So, there is an expression of authority and expression of light and power, but certainly no expression of spirituality which you find in Buddha images.

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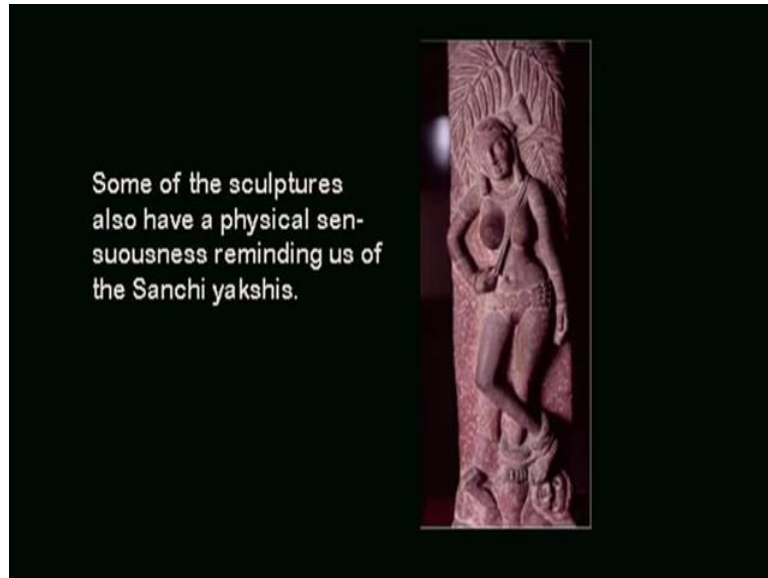
Sculptures from the Mathura centre have the characteristic features of the previous stylistic tradition.

Robust body, heavy features and the retaining of the original quality of the stone -- seem to be hall mark of Mathura sculptures.



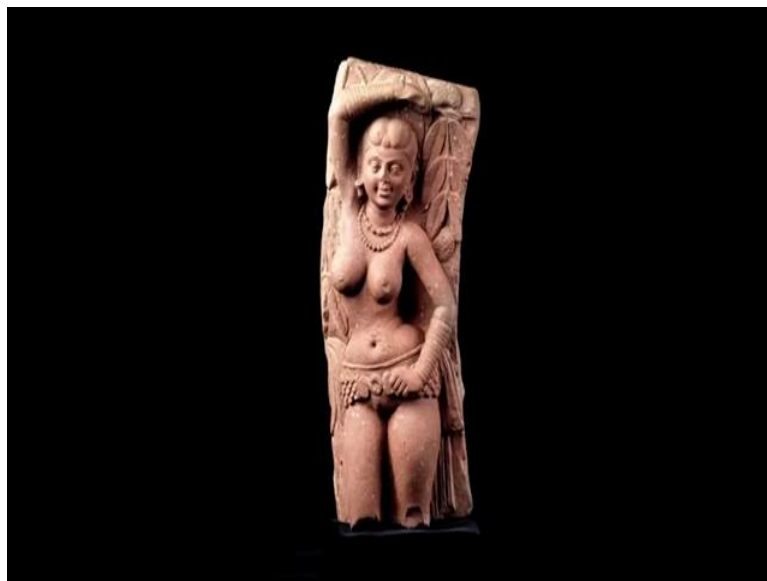
So, sculptures from the Mathura have that characteristic features of the previous stylistic tradition which you have seen partially like in Bharhut and Sanchi and to some extent Amaravathi that is it is about very strong beautiful (Refer Time: 10:47) body features are very heavy and the original quality of the stone has always been retained like the way it has been retained in Sanchi, like the way it has been retained in Bharhut. Even I would say Amaravathi in Mathura sculptures too you find that the quality of the stone is very apparent the moment you look at this sculptures you know that these are red sand stone even the porous of the red sands stone is also there as the part of the sculpture the body of the sculpture all this is going to change when you look at the sculptures from Gandhara.

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Before that let me tell you that from Mathura beside the images of Buddha, Buddhishakta and the figures of kings like Kanishka in other Kushana kings. You also get to see this kind of sensuous female Yakshis figures, which remind us of the Sanchi bracket Yakshis in somewhere there are plenty of such representations of Yakshi figures in Kushana period.

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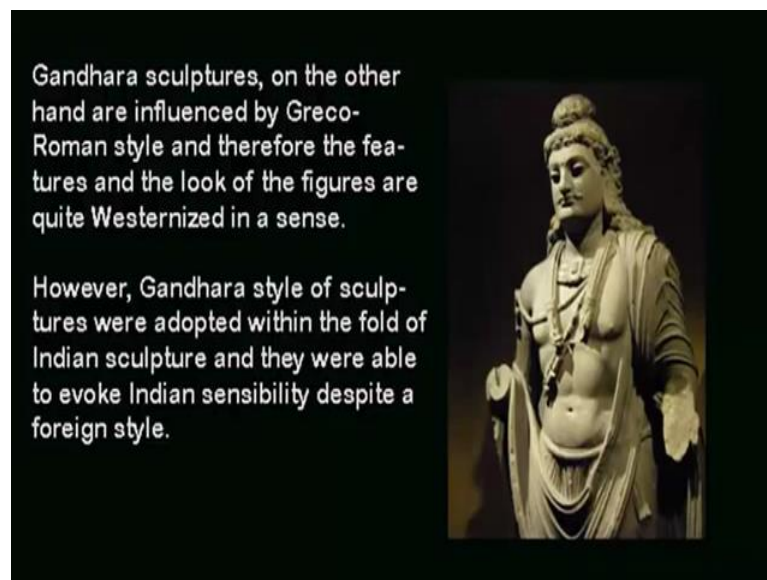


And this sensuality of the figures again has got something to do with the way the

sculpture had treated the stone. So, it almost looks like as if these figures are emerging from the stone their part of the quality of the stone they do not deny the hardness of the stone so this is incredible.

And this does not have any theory you need to look at the sculpture in order to feel that the quality of the body the sensuous quality of the body of this female figures have become one with the sensuous quality of the stone and this is a remarkable achievement the Kushanas sculptures.

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Compared to Kushana I mean Mathura of Kushana period when you look at the Gandhara sculptures you see something strikingly different. The Buddha or Buddhishakta of Gandhara they do not look like very typical Indian figures I mean the kind of figures that you have come across that you have seen in Mathura the despite their physicality and spiritual quality they still have that Indian identity. But the Gandhara sculptures do not have very visible Indian identity they rather carry the influence of the Greco roman style and it has to be. Because once again remember where Gandhara is located in the north west frontier that is a place where you remember the Greek invader Alexander the great he reached up to that point he left behind lot of Greco roman culture there.

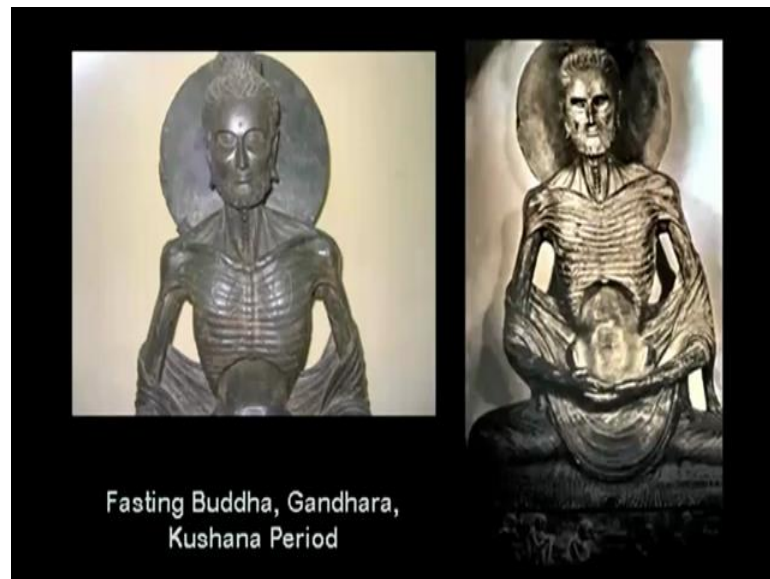
And the artists who were kind of trained in that kind of stylistic sculptures when they were or they had to do Buddha obviously, their style their talent their way of carving a sculpture would naturally reflect their Greco roman background. However, Gandhara styles of sculptures were adapted within the fold of Indian sculpture and since it was the part of the larger Kushana Empire. This Kushana people never felt that the Gandhara sculptures are foreign sculptures, they were accepted accommodated and as a result Gandhara sculptures occupy a brilliant space within the history of Indian sculpture.

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Now, just make a striking comparison between a Gandhara head of a Buddha probably with a Greek head the similarity is very strong despite the fact that where as the Greek head is very pragmatic. It is looking at this very real practical world I mean his expression is very earth bound, but look at the half closed eyes of the Gandhara head that is what we identify as spiritual quality.

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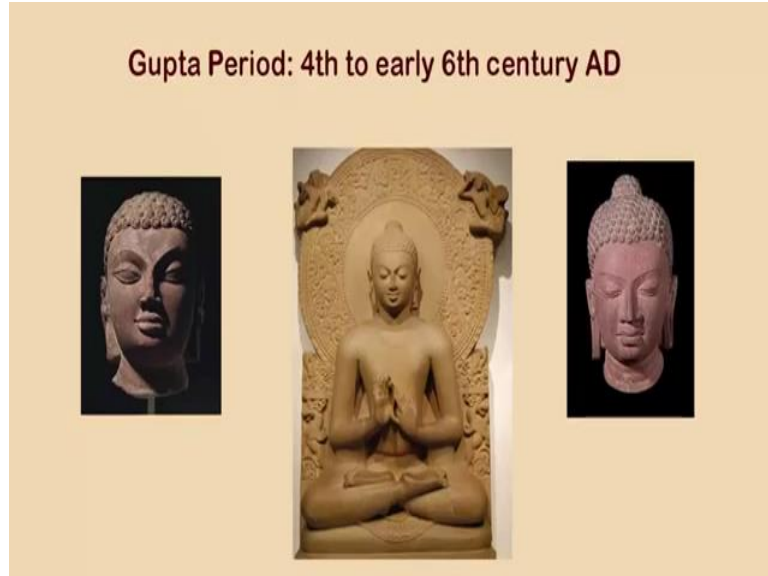


So, there is an element of realism in Gandhara sculpture because of the Greco roman background. And that realism took them to the extent that when they were suppose to show the movement or the situation when lord Buddha was fasting he was in meditation under the Bodhi tree as you all know the story and he was fasting for days and nights for months and years. So, when they are the Gandhara artists decided to do sculptures or kind of image presenting the fasting Buddha they went to the extent of showing the skeleton ribs of Lord Buddha this is the 1st time and only time in the history of Indian sculpture that you get to see Buddha in skeletal form.

So, instead of giving it a overly spiritual quality the Gandhara sculptures straight away went to that directory realism and they did not fell hesitant in showing the ribs of lord Buddha the cage rib cage of lord Buddha and his skeletal situation the body condition due to long days and months and years of fasting and these fasting Buddha images from Gandhara are considered to be the master pieces of Indian sculpture.

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Gupta Period: 4th to early 6th century AD



Our next royal dynasty is Gupta period which has not only produced like Kushana in numerable sculptures of a very high quality. But Gupta period is also rightly known as the classical period in Indian art because they were able to, but a let me put this way in Gupta period we see a culmination of all that was happening previously you begin from Sanchi, Bharhut, Amaravathi, Gandhara, Mathura everything culminated into a kind of standardized (Refer Time: 17:37) aesthetics of art with certain norms which became.

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The foundation of the Gupta empire in the 4th century A.D. marks the beginning of another era. The Gupta monarchs were powerful upto the 6th century in North India. Art, science and literature flourished greatly during their time. The iconographic canons of Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist divinities were perfected and standardised, which served as ideal models of artistic expression for later centuries, not only in India but also beyond its border.

So, acceptable which reached the pinnacle of the aesthetics that eventually. It was considered to be classical something that should not be questioned. Now, the foundation of Gupta Empire in the 4th century AD marks the beginning of another era. Following Kushana the Gupta monarchs were powerful up to the 6th century in North India and beside art it was science, literature, medicine, everything flourished greatly during that time the iconographic canons of Brahmanical, Jain, Buddhist, divinities were perfected standardized which served as ideal models of artistic expression for later centuries not only in India, but also beyond its border.

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With the Gupta period India entered upon the classical phase of sculpture. By the efforts of the centuries, techniques of art were perfected, definite types were evolved, and ideals of beauty were formulated with precision.

There was no more groping in the dark, no more experimentation. A thorough intelligent grasp of the true aims and essential principles of art, a highly developed aesthetic sense and masterly execution by skilled hands produced those remarkable images which were to be the ideal and despair of the Indian artists of subsequent ages.

The Gupta sculptures not only remained models of Indian art for all time to come but they also served as ideals for the Indian colonies in the Far East.

And at this point let me tell you that it is from Gupta period that we get to see that the Indian art is now opening itself up to beside Buddhism also Jainism and Hinduism or Brahmanical religion. And that is one of the reasons why during Gupta period we see art related to all these 3 phases whereas, up to Kushana period apart from the royal figures of kings rest of whatever you see they are all Buddhist art in Gupta period beside Buddhist art you see Jain sculptures and a number of Hindu sculptures as well.

And in a way we can consider Gupta period also as the beginning of the Brahmanical art in India and we see Hindu icons representations of Hindu divinities, Hindu Gods and Goddesses and also Hindu mythological narratives. So, with the Gupta period India

enters into the classical phase of sculpture and by the efforts of the century techniques of art were perfected definite types were evolved and ideas of beauty were formulated with precision.

Now there is no more groping in the dark no more experimentation everything has been canonized and as a result Gupta sculptures not only remained models of Indian art for all time to come, but they also served as ideals for the Indian colonies in the forest and we will find when you read the history of the south east Asian art there is lot of influence of Gupta art in the south east Asian art as well like Java (Refer Time: 20:31) Indonesia Cambodia so far (Refer Time: 20:35) in all these places.

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Look at a few specimens from Gupta period, despite the differences in may be scale height the treatment of the body and the quality of the stone most of the Gupta sculptures have a very visible quality, which can be termed as a classical quality now how do you know that look at the posture look at the balance of the body and more importantly look at the gaze of the figures where these figure are looking and particularly if you are looking at something like this the image of Buddha.

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Or even a portion of the body you can see there is a peculiar sense of balance which they this figures are consciously maintaining. This is a famous Mathura Buddha where the right hand is partially broken, but in spite of the fact that this sculpture is partially mutilated you can see the beautiful hollow right behind the head you can see the thin almost transparent drapery all over the body you can see the standing posture the look.

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Now, here is one sculpture the sculpture of Buddha without the head even then though, this sculpture does not have the head still you can almost feel the presence of a spiritually attuned personality standing right in front of you, it is the posture and secondly, it is also the treatment of the stone treatment of the drapery and it is also the slight bend in the right leg. Whereas, the left leg is straight and this slight bend in the right leg it produces a posture of relaxation which is extremely important to create a physical balance which is not very overtly alert, but which is relaxed and hence graceful. So, graceful is the quality that this Gupta sculptures were always trying to achieve.

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Beside Buddhist art, Hindu or Brahmanical art too flourished in Gupta period. Images of Varaha, Vishnu and other Hindu deities were made in great numbers either independently or to place them on temple walls.

Varaha sculptures
Gupta period



So, beside Buddhist art Hindu or Brahmanical art too flourished in Gupta period. So, you get images of Varaha, Vishnu and other Hindu deities in great numbers made either independently or to be placed on the temple walls. Particularly for some reason Varaha becomes very popular and very frequently made sculpture in Gupta period, and at this juncture I would like to also tell you and I believe it started happening little by little gradually from the Kushana period that the patriots the very powerful mighty kings they started they began to identify themselves with the Gods.

And they never equated, but there is a strange equation that is taking place in the representation of many Gods, where the Gods almost looked as mighty as the emperor and the emperor looks as divine as the God. So, this is a new face whereas, till Amaravathi we have seen that the patriots kept themselves distanced from the divinities, they knew that they were not divine beings they were mortal kings, but from Kushana period and it rapidly kind of a developed during the Gupta period that the kings tried desperately to identify themselves with the divinities you can see that happening in sculptures over and over again.

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For example this relief sculpture from Udayagiri caves this Varaha who is rescuing it is a kind of a rescue mission he was under rescue mission and he rescued Bhudevi that is earth from plunder and huge catastrophe and finally, after the rescue operation look the way he is standing, he is standing not like any incarnation of Vishnu he is almost standing like a king a very proud king. A king who is kind of he is showing off his power after successfully completing the rescue operation that this apart in this kind of relief sculptures from Gupta period.

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You get to see what we call the narrative panels, we have seen that happening in Sanchi, in Bharhut, in Amaravati, in Kushana period we have not found much narrative panels except a few small relief panels from Gandhara, but in Gupta period again we get to see lot of panels and these tendency towards narrative pasteurization narrative sculptures is going to increase even after Gupta period in most of the important and very famous post Gupta sites like Mahabalipuram, Khajuraho, Konada so on and so forth.

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So, we can see here Gajendra Moksha this is again a story from mythology depicted in terms of a narration you can see Anantasaivishnu, this is not a narrative panel it is almost like a iconographic composition, but some kind of story is obviously, there behind this composition and look also do not miss the naturalistic rendering of the body. The anatomical features too look very naturalistic they look soft, they look tender and it is not over stylized, but they are very conscious about the graceful posture position and the quality of the contours their bodily appearance. Gupta period is also well known for the terracotta sculptures.

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So, in these last few slides I will be quickly running through some finest examples of terracotta sculptures coming from Gupta period. So, if you are looking at Gupta period sculptures do not just get stuck with only the stones sculptures remember from Gupta period we get hundreds of fascinating examples of terracotta sculptures as well, this is one of them.

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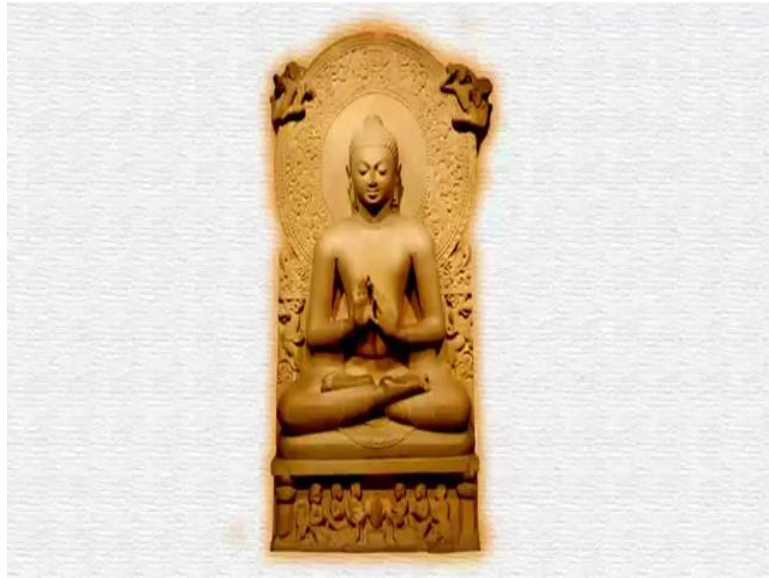


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This is another this is another I am just showing you three, but there are many fascinating terracotta sculptures small little relief compositions which look so lively that they make you feel as if they are made just today or may be two days back they also look so contemporary.

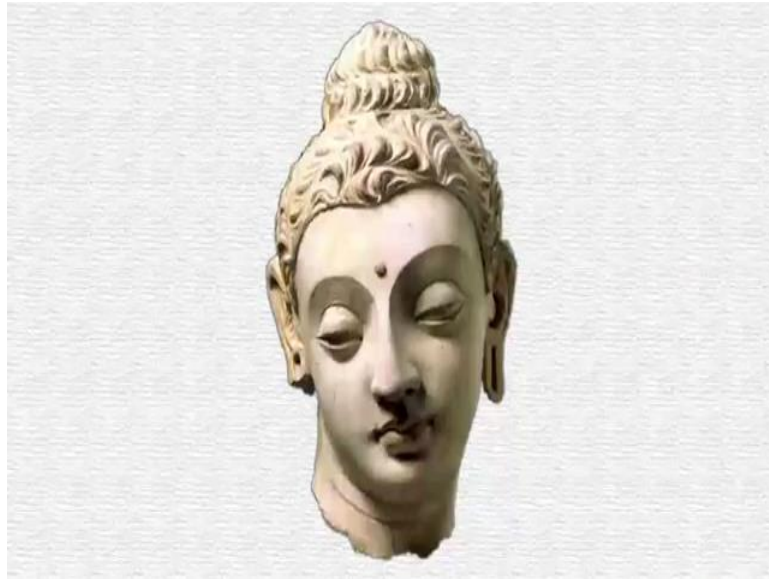
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All said and done it must be remembered that one of the finest specimens of the classical art produced during Gupta period is the statue of the meditating Buddha which is now located in (Refer Time: 28:28) museum. So, it is also known as (Refer Time: 28:31) Buddha.

Now, one can take at least 30 to 40 minutes explaining the classical features of this particular sculpture we are not going in to that right now, but what I will ask you to do is to look at this sculpture very carefully meditate on this sculpture and try to find out why this sculpture is known as the best classical example of Indian sculpture in within the context of the Gupta period.

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So, whether this is from this one is from Gandhara. The previous one is from the other score that is Mathura Sana score. So, whether it is from Gandhara or (Refer Time: 29:22) the point is Gupta period despite or irrespective of the stylistic verse diversity was able to maintain what we generally understand as a spiritual quality of the Buddhist figures we should take note of that as well.

Thank you.