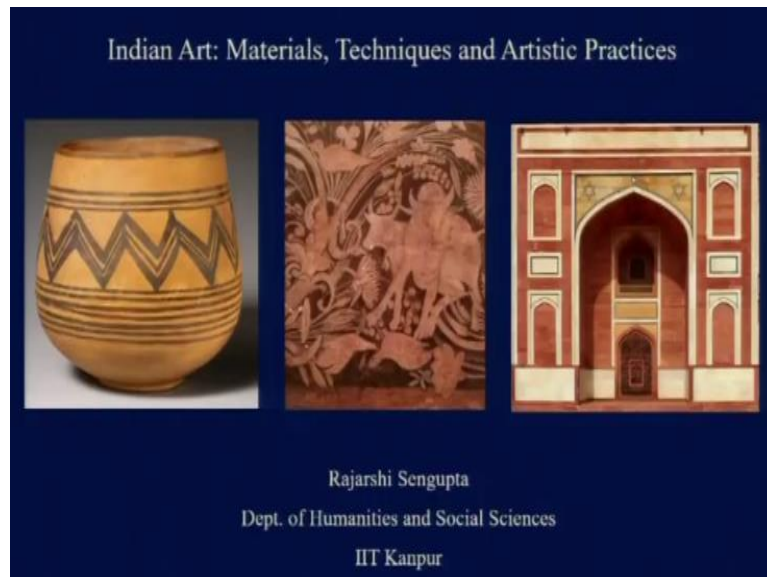


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 1

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Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta and a warm welcome to all of you to this course on Indian art. Our course is titled Indian art materials, techniques and artistic practices. And this course covers a wide range of subject matters that starts from the Harappan civilization in the third millennium BC to something that had happened very recently, the contemporary art in India. So, among all these other different kinds of practices that we see, in them we have different kinds of societal conditions, we have political changes, we have cultural aspects.

All of them they have a huge role to play in shaping what we know today as Indian art. So, we will be discussing all these different aspects and we will try to give an overview of different kinds of practices that had survived and flourished in the Indian subcontinent. So, first thing first, India is a country of great diversity in terms of the culture, in terms of demographic, in terms of geography, in terms of different kinds of societal practices.

We see different kinds of actions and practices that have shaped up in the subcontinent for ages and that also adds to the tremendous amount of complexity as well as the richness of what we know as Indian visual culture. So, going with that I think what we will have to understand it that we will start a discussion with the idea of India. So when we say India in

this particular respect of Indian art, we are not talking about the map of India that had been there after 1947.

But if we are going back to third millennium BC or then of course if you are coming back in time, so we have the entire Indian subcontinent as the place where all these cultures and all these visual practices have flourished. So, when in the course I will be talking about India or the Indian subcontinent, I mean the entire subcontinent which are also inclusive of the present day nation states as Pakistan and Bangladesh.

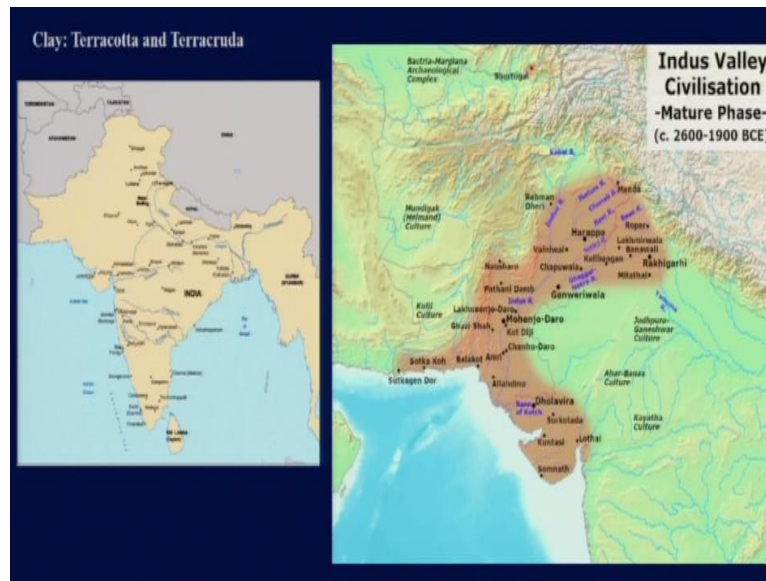
So talking about the geographical conditions and then how the art had developed in these places, we will be looking at different materials every week. So in the first week, for example, we will be looking at clay. In clay, we will be looking at terracotta and terracuda those two kinds of practices and then from there we will be looking at some of the other materials in the subsequent weeks.

The reason for us to focus on materials and not on the chronology is to be more focused on what the materials, techniques and artistic practices offer us to have on our visual practices and culture in general. So for that reason, we will try to understand how this material practices have shaped in the Indian subcontinent, how do we handle different kinds of materials with our hands as well as part of our societal practices and artistic practices and then take those things further.

In this respect, we will also look into some of the other materials, for example pigment. When we think about pigment, we think that how pigments are used in different kinds of painting practices starting with the caves in Bhimbetka to the Ajanta, Sita Novosel, and so many other sites where mural painting had flourished. And so we will be looking into the idea of pigment and from there we will be approaching the history.

The same thing we can say about the use of paper, when we think that the arrival of paper, their impact on the visual culture, then how papers are produced, how colours are produced and how miniature paintings and different kinds of manuscripts are made. So through those lenses, we will be looking at how paper became an integral part of understanding Indian art. So each week we will have this one theme with which we will be approaching the material. So coming back to that, that what we will be doing for our first module and that is on the site of Indus Valley.

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So Indus Valley sites as you can see on the map, that in the right side of the screen we have the map of the Indian subcontinent and in the north western frontier of the Indian subcontinent we have the river Indus and other tributaries. And all of them, they create this valley, the river valley which is mostly fed by the soil that was the sedimented by the river. And then of course that is the river valley that was created by the river Indus and through which where a number of different sites had flourished over time.

So when we talk about the Indus River Valley and that also had some of the earliest evidences of what we know today as Indian art that is the reason starting our discussion from the Indus River Valley is such an important part for getting into or delving into our discussion on Indian art. So when we talk about the Indus River Valley, we do not just say the river Indus, but on the screen, on the map as we can see that there is the Indus river that flows through the north western frontier of the Indian subcontinent.

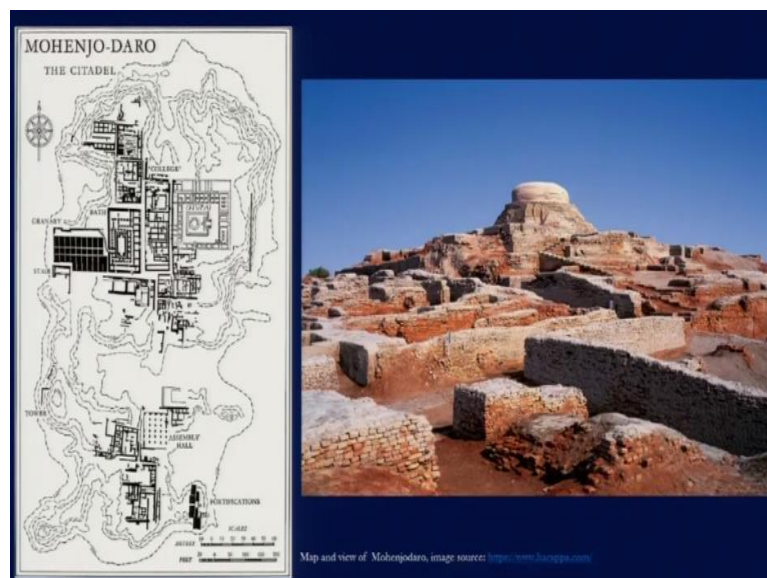
And from there we also have the northern Indian plains that reaches until the river Yumna and the river Ganga or the Ganges. The entire area we know to have flourished during the third millennium and the second millennium BC and the entire area is also the floodplains. So, those are the commonalities between the sites that we found by the river Indus as well as some of the sites which are not so close to the Indus river but also considered to be part of the entire Indus Valley.

So, in this entire place what we find that from the third millennium BC, at least from the third millennium BC, there are structured and very well-organized cities that have started developing. And from there, we also see there have been tremendous amount of trade exchanges, import and exports, and different kind of exchanges with the people in and around the region had taken place and that is the reason why in the Indus river a valley became such an important part of the Indian history.

Now, some of the important sites that we find Indus river valley would be the city of Harappa, and the city of Harappa which perhaps suggest the matured phase of the Indus valley civilisation, and that the city of Harappa we believe to have flourished between 2600 BC to 1900 BC. And then we also have some of the other cities, for example the city of Mohenj-daro which is further south in the Indus river valley.

And then we also have some of the other very important sites, for example Dholavira, Rakhigarhi, and so on and Lothal. So, some of the sites are now today in the nation of Pakistan and some of the sites are today in the nation state of India as we know. So what happened in these sites as we know that in the 1920s the excavation was started by the archaeological survey. And from there we slowly started to have some of the sites uncovered as well as some of the pottery fragments and everything else that came into our observation.

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Now, when talking about the art or the visual culture that had flourished in the Indus river valley, why we think clay is such an important part of it? The first thing first that the entire area is considered the floodplains. That means the entire area was shaped by the river and by

the river we also see that I mean there is an abundance of clay. And clay not only helps making the figure but it also plays a huge role in shaping the agriculture which is indispensable for any civilization.

And at the same time clay is also used for different kinds of building practices. So, since this is the area we are talking about it is in flood plains, so we see there are different kinds of canals those were created from the river for irrigation as well as for agricultural practices. And the canals were also made for supplying water to different sites in the entire valley, so the canal systems.

And then the mud that was collected from the riverbank those are either used for making forts or for making different kinds of city walls and so on. So, from there we find the importance of clay had been there ingrained in the material culture of this people. So we do not have much of stone or the hard material, the conventional material which are used for architecture building. So we have clay in this area in abundance.

And that is the reason this is the material that was picked up by the people in this valley and they were utilized. So, talking about the use of clay, we have two different kinds of use for the clay and that also suggest the two terms that I have used in the title of this module and that is terracotta and terracruda. So, terracotta is the baked clay in which the items, objects, bricks and so on those things are made from soft clay, then they are sunbaked and then they are put in kiln for being baked.

So, after they are baked, they become much more durable and they are resistant to water and the weather conditions. So, that becomes ideal for making buildings and so many different other kinds of material for habitation, for public buildings and so on. So, on the contrary we also have something that is the unbaked clay and that is terracruda and terracruda is something that we find that in some places the mud walls are erected by the river.

The mud walls are created by the river for the embankments as well as for the city walls and so on. In some places, we also find that the city walls they are seven meter in their perimeters as wide as that. And in the other uses of the mud or the unbaked clay that we find and that is for utilizing different kinds of ritualistic purposes that is for utilizing different objects for

ritualistic purposes. So, all those things we see them to be part of this, the cities those were created.

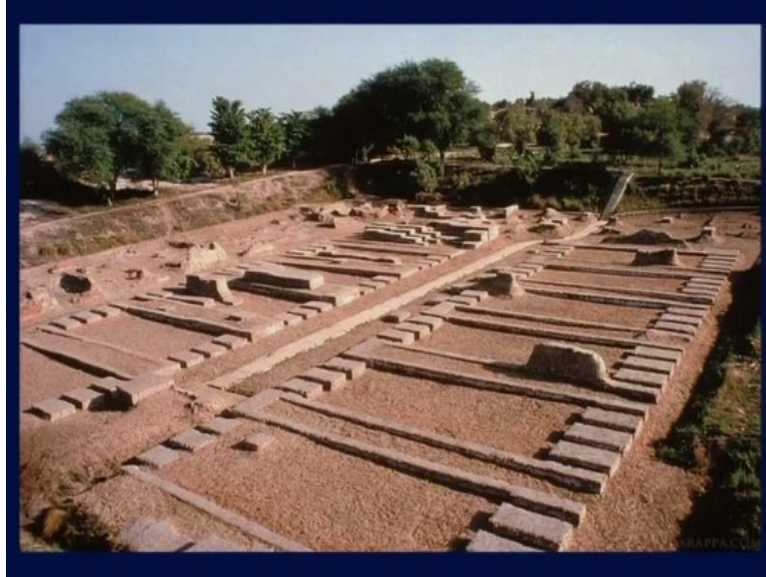
Now, in the city of Mohenjo-daro, which had developed before the city of Harappa if we see the city plan as we can see on screen, so in this city we see that it has a clear north south orientation. And in this city, we have that the existence of the city walls that we have spoken about that was made both from mud as well as from the bricks. And within the city walls, we have different structures and all those structures were started being excavated from the 1920s.

So within the city walls what all we see here are different kinds of the structures for example the public bath, stupa like structure, the image we have on screen in the right side that shows this stupa like structure it could have been some kind of assembly where the senate or the ruling government of the place, they would deliver a lecture or to gather a public for different kinds of purpose because we do not have any other evidence that suggests that these were religious structures.

So apart from this stupa, apart from the public bath, we also have the granary which is also in very impressive structure and also we have assembly hall and so on. And right outside the city walls or sometimes within the limits of the city walls we also have graveyards, where from where the skeletons of the bodies those were buried during the Harappan period are excavated, which also tells us more about the visual culture, the material culture around this time period.

Now, since the Harappan script had never been deciphered, so we are all left with the material evidences, for example the bricks and different kinds of other objects. Those suggest that what kind of culture they had there, but we do not have access to the script.

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So getting little in detail about the structure of the granary, we see there was this impressive granary that was made in the city of Harappa. And here the granary we see that is around 45X45 square meters in its size and in this granary we see that it is almost divided in half in two segments. And in this segments, we see that there are six units in each side. And those units, we see that they have brick bases.

And on the top of the brick bases it is believed that the wooden structures were erected and that is how the entire granary structure was created. So granary is something where we find that the grains were collected and then they were kept for the public to use, so that also suggests that how the city might have functioned. In the city we also have a really organized way of the drainage system, the roads were also laid out in perfect grid like patterns.

So, there are roads which will run north to south as we have also seen the map of the city that has a very clear north south orientation. And then there are also roads which will run east to west. So, the intersections of this important roads will be the crossroads where they are also very much important part of addressing which structure will be erected where. So, that is how we find that how all that importance structures.

For example the assembly, the granary and of course the stupa, the public bath and so on. They are situated in the different parts of the city, perhaps that also played a great importance in terms of understanding the importance of those sites in the Indus valley period. Another important feature the Indus valley culture, we find is that it is not monumental because if we

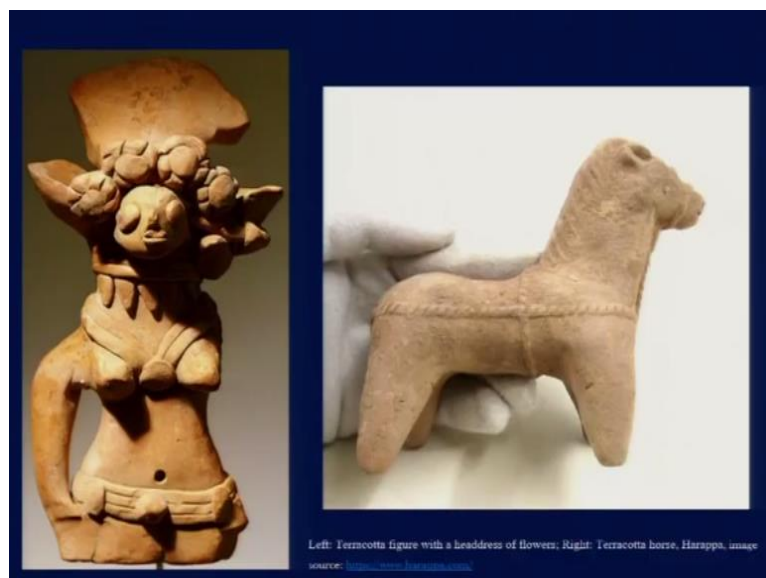
are talking about the second millennium and the third millennium BC, around that time we also have for example the Mesopotamia.

And then Egypt was also developing around the same time. The Syrians, they were also been in their full glory at those times. However, we see that in those respects, in those regards we find that in Egypt, in Mesopotamia and in Syria, there are very clear marks of the royal families who had ruled on those areas and that is the reason we find the monumental structures, those were erected.

For example, the pyramid, the stepped pyramids and different other palace complexes and so on. Unlike all of those places, we do not really find these kind of monumental structures in the Harappan sites and that is something that came as a surprise. At the same time, it also perhaps suggest that there was a different kind of governmental system in the Harappan cities as opposed to the sites in Mesopotamia an Egypt and so on.

And that also make people think about that whether there was a particular ruling family or there were elected members that they have ruled over these cities. So, that also makes us think about the governance of these places and all these things have been made possible through the analysis of the material remains that we have from these sites.

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So for example, the use of the brick, the use of terracotta, and so on. Now, from there we also find what is interesting is this the use of terracotta and I will be getting more into the use of terracotta instead of terracruda because terracruda even though there are some of the

suggestion is that the mud walls were used and perhaps materials or the objects which were made from the unbaked clay or from mud those were existing in these sites.

But we do not really have much evidence because mud decays with time. It can deteriorate with the existence of water and other weather conditions, which is not the same case for terracotta. So, I will be getting more into the use of terracotta and all the tangible evidence is that we have. So for example on screen we have the two different images and the image on the left side we have there is a female figurine.

And there have been at least some 10,000 fragments of figurines those are collected from these Harappan sites, the Indus valley sites till date. So, what we find in this figurines, they are pretty much small and humble in their shape and they are a model from clay for sure and so those are made from an additive process in which there are blocks of the clay and then they are shaped and then different kinds of hands and the legs and different body parts and ornaments and so on.

Those were made from different clay strips and they are added to the body. So, this is the process that is called the additive process as opposed to something which is carved from a stone which is almost the reductive process, which is the opposite of this additive process that we can find here. So in this additive process, what we also see the way this figures have been made in which if we can get into the details, we find there is a depiction of a female figurine here.

Now how to read the images in terms of that we know there is this one particular term I would like to mention here and that is iconography in which we find that how to recognize an icon or an image or an idol. The formal characteristics to recognize these images that is something that is called iconography. Now, in going with the iconographical features of this figure that we have on the left side of the screen, we see there is this female figure which has been modeled.

And we see that the physical features of this figure in which like the eyes are also been added with this two small blobs of clay. And then there is a thick lip, a pair of lips, those are also added to this face. And then we also see the other body parts, for example the hand which

touches the waist, and then of course the breasts and then the navel and so on. So we find that how the female figure that had been made here.

It follows the anatomical proportion as well as the different body parts that suggest that this is not gender neutral, but this is a female figurine. Now the other feature of this figure that we find it has this fan like huge headdress on the top of its head. And in this headdress, what we find that it is not only just fanship, but there are flower like forms which are made in series. And then we also have a choker like necklace which is covered around her neck.

And then we also have a hanging necklace that is there. And also in the waist, she also wears a waistband. So there seems to be an importance towards the ornaments that they have used during this time. So the ornaments are done with much detail. So it also might have suggested that the use of the ornaments in this particular respect, they might have also carried some cultural value that is the reason they have been done with much more detail compared to what we see in the body.

And for example this is one of the things that we find there from this Indus valley sites. The other one will be in the right side of the screen for example this horse figurine. And the horse figurine as you can see that there is a hand of a conservator which is holding the the horse figure and that also gives us a sense of the size of it. It is pretty much small, it is very portable.

And this horse figurines they also we find that if we go with iconographical study that they follow this the basic shape of a horse and then at the same time they also have the naturalistic execution of the different body parts. So the legs we find they have been simplified for the horse figurine to be stable but at the same time if we see the back and also the suggestion of the ears, the eyes and the fur and so on, those are the things that we find to be done with much naturalistic detail.

So, these are the things we have from this Indus valley sites, which are considered that either they were being made as part of some ritual or they can also be part of toys and the rituals there had been, it is believed that there had been elaborate rituals for childbirth because the health conditions and all those other issues were concerned and for that reason, there had been rituals on childbirth and the health of the newborn child and so on.

That is the reason we find that there have been many of these figures who are related to this fertility related issues as well as that there are many of these figures which go with the theme of this betterment of life and sustainment of life. Thank you.