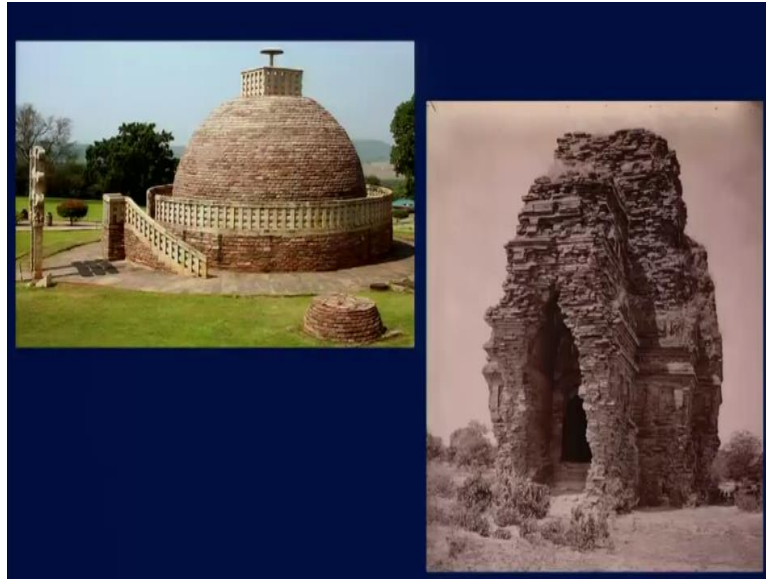


Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 22
Stone: Memorials, Architectural Remnants and Objects

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Hello everyone, we are continuing our discussion on stone and different kinds of uses of stone in this week or in this module. So, we have ended our discussion in the last lecture and that with the dolmen structures or with the burial structures in which we have seen that how the snake hood like resemblance was created with these blocks of stone or like how the umbrella like form was created to show reverence towards the deceased one.

So, those things we can also see that how those kinds of structures to show reverence to pay respect to the ancestors or to the deceased one had also contributed towards making the structures which are later on they are part of the formalized religions. So, for example we have already looked into some of the Buddhist architectural structures as well as the Hindu temples and in both temple and in the Buddhist structures.

For example, the stupas, we see that there is a kind of a vertical growth and there is a tremendous importance towards marking a sacred space where the structure sort of is projected out of the horizontal plane. So, the vertical projection of the structures on the

horizontal plane is something that we see they have started before the time we find the temples or the stupas came into existence.

And how this resonance or the essence of these kind of practices of erecting something vertically at a site which is significant to our community is something that remained even in both these religions, I would say in the other religions as well. So, for the Buddhist stupa as we know that this particular idea of stupa is it translates into making a piled-up form. So, pile that means that there are different kinds of objects, perhaps they are piled up.

And then they turn into this form which is called stupa and that is the reason what we can see this piled up form which also closely resemblance this South Indian burial sites like the ones which are like dolmens or this umbrella form which we have already looked into. So, that kind of shape having this vertical growth on a site which is revered by the entire community or a family that is something we find that to be reflected in the making of stupa as well.

So, it is the same kind of strategy one can see how that also affects the making of the Hindu temple, perhaps there is also a crucial difference between them. So, in the Hindu temples we find that it is definitely it is showing reverence or it is showing respect towards the deity, but the thing is that it is not always associated with memorial, it is not as always associated with the body remains of the ancestors or the deceased one.

Whereas in the Buddhist structure in this one, like for example the stupas that we find the prominent stupas that we have in our country, mostly they contain either the bodily remnants of Buddha himself or the important Buddhist monks and nuns. So, that kind of differences and the similarities one can draw between the earlier burial structures, the Buddhist stupas and the Hindu temples.

So, those kinds of things one can see and one can think that how certain kinds of practices have continued even out of their context and certain kinds of practices were transformed with time when the context became different.

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So, from there I wanted to focus more on how different kinds of stones are used and how different kinds of stones are utilized. Now, if we think about the way in which the stone is used, so a block of stone one can imagine and then whatever the stone is usually while making sculptures or while making architectural fragments what one does is in the block of stone of the artisan's choice, the sculptor's choice, then we find that is marked with some kind of drawing materials.

So, that can be charcoal, that can be some kind of graphite based or carbon based material, that can be some kind of grease based material and then the initial drawings are made on the rough stone surface. And then once the drawing is made, according to that the chunks of stone are carved outside of that image area where the drawing has been done and then the drawing is further developed and then the development of those drawings.

Then we find that how those drawings have been made into three-dimensional form. So, first the large chunks of the stones are removed for the basic shape, different kinds of hammers and chisels and chisels of different width and different shapes those are also used for carving the broader areas from carving the smaller details and that is how we find that finally how the stone that starts from those rough drawings and rough surface they are made into the sculptures or architectural fragments.

And the sculptures which look lifelike which come very close to the way we understand human beings and animals and so on. So, here we have examples of Mathura sandstone. So, Mathura sandstone is perhaps one of the most celebrated stones that we find in the Indian

subcontinent and from as early as from the Kushan time period, we find it had been used profusely for making different kinds of sculptures and sometimes we also find they were used for making architectural structures as well.

So, here we have the image of a crowned Bodhisattva. So, crowned Bodhisattva we can see that what is specific about the crowned Bodhisattva, but before that let me just focus a little bit more on the characteristic of sandstone. So, sandstone is something that is made of the quartz crystals. The quartz crystals are sedimented over time and then that is how with the pressure and with the heat those are transformed into stones.

So since they are sedimented and they are formed with an extended period of time that is the reason we find that to be relatively softer compared to few of the other stones that we will study as part of this week. So, what happens in terms of the sandstone since it is sedimented, in some sandstone we find the layers of the sedimentation are somewhat like distant and that is the reason the pores within the layers are created.

So, when there are more pores, we find that to be more brittle, it may be soft and also if there are more pores that can absorb water from the atmosphere, from its surrounding and if it absorbs more and more water then it eventually breaks down. So that is not something that is desired for making sculptures or even architecture. So, choice of the stone it is not just about craftsmanship on the stone, but the stone itself is also something that is very important and crucial part of what we are going to produce.

So, if someone puts much effort in terms of making a sculpture like this that the one we have on screen, but if the material does not support the process, then what happens is that the entire thing just breaks apart. So, that is the reason understanding all these material qualities of stone and if you are looking at sandstone, then thinking about this soft sandstone or the hard sandstone or the ones which are more porous, so all these characteristic features are very important.

So, then only one can proceed with the work and then one can think the work will have a longer time span or not. So here what we have in this particular sculpture is this we see that this very characteristic Mathura red sandstone is utilized for making this sculpture and in this one what we have is this in the crowned Bodhisattva there is on the crown as Bodhisattvas as

I have already mentioned that they are the ones who are considered to be, they are treated as the royals and they are the ones who have the knowledge of Bodhi, but they decide to stay on earth so that they can be of help to the other human beings who are on the path of enlightenment. And that is the reason the Bodhisattvas are considered the ones who have much compassion for the humankind, the compassionate ones.

So, here what we have in this figure of Bodhisattva is this there is this the crown that it wears and this this crown it has the decoration and at the top of that usually there is an image of Buddha on the top of that here and that is also something that we find that to be a diligently followed as part of the iconography. So, the Buddha being the spiritual master of the Bodhisattva that is placed on the top of the crown there for Bodhisattvas.

And then in terms of the other iconographical traits, what we find here is how these eyes are created by following these iconographical traits of making it as a bow. And then on the top of that here is this particular sign that is called urna and urna is this sign of the tuft of hair that Buddha had. So, that is something that has been stylized in the later times and made like a circle but that is basically which is also a sign of the chakravartin or Buddha.

So, that is something that we find here as well. And then of course, the eyes we find them to be half closed and they are done with great care so that the eyes of this compassionate being are expressed in their full glory. And then we also see that it has its flowing hair locks which is not always found in the Bodhisattvas sculptures, but here we certainly see that there is much stress or much importance that is given on these flowing locks of hair that we have on his shoulder.

So, this is also something that we find where this sculpture is preserved today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. So, they consider that how this particular way of like its flowing hair on the shoulder, it can also be considered to be as a response to the image of the Jaina tirthankara Rishabhanatha. So, Rishabhanatha this Jaina tirthankara is someone who also is identified with this flowing hair and something that we usually do not see in the Bodhisattva sculptures, but here we do see.

So, it can be a response to the Jaina image as the museum claims. In terms of the other details what we find here is the elaborate jewellery that the Bodhisattva wears and starting with his

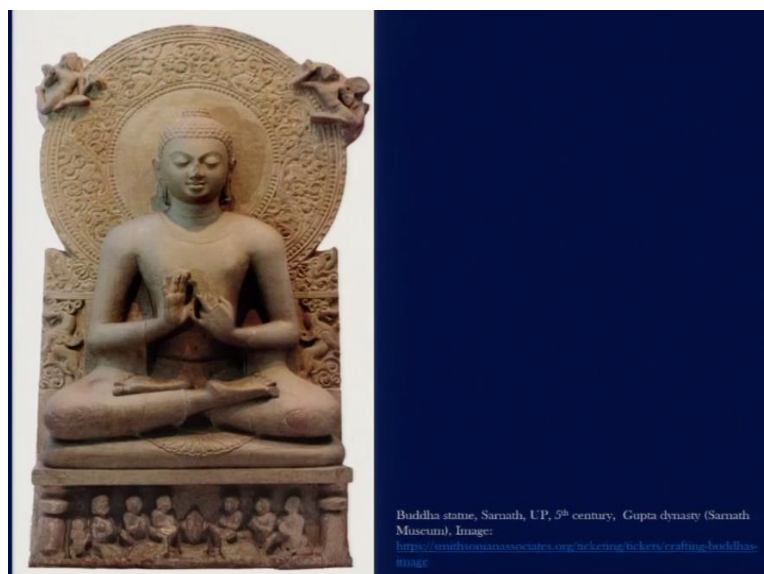
broad necklaces, and then this thread that that sort of runs from his left shoulder to the right waist, and then then of course there other threads which are also there that can be made of pearls or other jewels.

So, these are the all these different kinds of details that we find starting with the eyes, then all the ups and downs of the lips, this slight smile which is created in his face and from there to the details of the hair and then the necklace, the crown and everything. So, if those are the kinds of details that we see, but there are also some of the surfaces for example, the body, the upper part of the body, the torso that we have here where there are not much of these details.

But what we have there is a perfect balance between the surface which has been smoothed and not too many of the details has been done there whereas in the ornaments all those details are created. So, the broad surface, the uniform surface and the detailed surface these two kinds of surfaces are kept side by side and that is how the overall impact of this sculpture is created.

On the right side, I also wanted to show the back view of the same sculpture where it perhaps also sort of emphasizes the material quality of this sculpture where we see the freckle marks on the stone, which is part of the identity of this Mathura sandstone is much more pronounced and there one can see that how the surface has not been carved away. It has been carved for the front side and that is how we can observe more of the characteristic of this particular sandstone.

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From there we move on to another use of the sandstone and that is perhaps the Chunar sandstone, again not very far from Mathura and in the northern Indian plains on the bank of river Ganges and Chunar is not that far from the city of Varanasi or Sarnath. And what we have here is the image of a Buddha, which was found from Sarnath in Uttar Pradesh. So, this is an image which has been long considered to be a classical representation of Buddha.

The time period that is 5th century and that is usually in the northern India that is understood as the time which was when the Gupta dynasty was ruling the parts of northern India. So, what we have here is this in the monastery or perhaps in the site of Sarnath this image along with the Ashokan pillars and the stupas those were created and it is the same site. Of course, one can think that the Ashokan pillar was created in the second century BC.

From that time, there were continuous reverence of this site and later on more and more sculptures and architecture were added and this one was created in the site of Sarnath in the 5th century. So, what we see here is that how Chunar sandstone is used here for making the image of Buddha preaching his first sermon. So, this particular way in which one can see that he places his both hands, so this is something that is called as turning the wheel of law.

And that is the reason this particular mudra or this hand gesture that we have here in this image is called dharmachakrapravartana mudra. And in this one what we have that is Buddha is not shown here to be reassuring the devotees by his abhayamudra or like he is not being the benevolent one or granting boons, but he is shown here to be representing this particular historical moment when he first taught his sermon or like he first turned the wheel of law.

So that is something that is we find yet to be very significant. So what all we see in this sculpture, and then we will come into the discussion of why this is considered to be the classical sculpture and by whom. So, in this sculpture what we have is this very peaceful image of Buddha and with the slight smile in his face and then of course the other details for example the urna that is the tuft of his hair in the forehead and then the ushnisha or the head which had actually projected outward after he attained bodhi.

So, all those characteristic features along with his long ear lobes those are also very prominently projected here. And then of course, the hand gesture to show dharmachakrapravartana and all those things we find them to be present here. And the fabric

that sort of drapes his body, the textile is almost diaphanous, it is almost see through that it almost looks like I mean he is nude except the folds and some parts of the entire area that that suggests that there is a textile, apart from that there is almost no traces of it.

Now, apart from the body what all we see here is that he is sitting in a highly ornamented throne. And this throne is also something that is of high relevance because there are two lions that we find on the two sides of this throne. And as we have already discussed that another name of Buddha is a Shakyasimha and that means like the simha, the lion of the Shakya clan. So Buddha came from this Shakya clan and here since he is considered to be the Shakyasimha, so he is enthroned on the simhasana.

So, simhasana we also find that to be reserved for the royalty but for his particular association, we find that Buddha is also placed on this simhasana. And then at the bottom register here what we have there are devotees and then there is the wheel of law at the centre that we find. And then there are two deers that we have on two sides who are flanking the wheel of law. So, these are the signs which commemorate his first sermon in the Deer Park in Sarnath.

So in Sarnath in the Deer Park area where it was of course one can you imagine that this is a place which was inhabited by deers Mrigadava forest and so that is the place where he first taught his sermon and that is the reason it had been commemorated by showing this wheel of law at the centre. And then we have devotees on both the sides with architectural pillars here. So, all these different things are carved out of this sandstone here.

Now, apart from what we have in the bottom register and on the two sides, then there is this ornamented halo that we have here. And in one hand, it looks like that this is part of the simhasana that it is like a backrest where Buddha is sitting, but on the other hand, this can also be considered to be the halo behind his head because he is a divinity. So, this sort of serves both these purposes.

And this halo that we have here, the central part of the halo is blank, it is just like smoothed and carved with no other details and then the fringes, the borders, they are elaborately carved in low relief. So, this is something we have and then on the two sides in the upper ends here

and here there are two celestial beings that we find the flying celestial beings who do not walk or run but they fly and they are greeting Buddha for his achievement.

So, this is what we have in the sculpture and then the reason why we also find this to be significant is this really careful, at the same time playful elegant balance between the surfaces which are kept unadorned like the body and everything and then the surfaces which have elaborate ornamented motifs, for example the halo, the simhasana and so on. If you also see the way these are carved, then we find that the entire halo has been carved with very low relief so that the lines are there.

But they are not really disturbing the contour lines of Buddha's body. So, the contour lines of Buddha's body that we have here they are carved in high relief and that is the reason they have this very prominent visual presence in this sculpture here. So, the halo even though it has much of detail, the ornamental details, they are not carved in such high relief so that they do not overpower the surface of Buddha's body.

The same can be said about the surface that is there right beside Buddha's body here these two stylized lions. So, they are also carved in a somewhat low relief or medium relief so that they contrast the unadorned part of Buddha's body, but also they do not overpower for the amount of details that has gone into it. So, there is very balance between the details, the ornamentation, at the same time keeping this unadorned part of Buddha's body.

So, this balance between all of them, they make this sculpture really relevant and at the same time that is something that makes the sculpture relevant and also it has been studied over the period of time. So, during the colonial period that we find that this particular kind of, orientation where the balance between two different kinds of carving, the ornamentation and creating the anatomy following the human anatomy, and then making the expression in Buddha's face and everything else, those things were closely compared to the ones we find in the Greco Roman context in Europe.

And also since this Chunar sandstone that it is grey in colour which is very close to the way it appears like marble, so for all those reasons during the colonial period, we find the scholarship suggested this culture and the other ones which were created during the Gupta

period in northern India, those are the ones which are considered to be the classical ones, which resemble closely to the classical Greco Roman sculptures.

However, those views have been also challenged and then what we find that there were many different regional styles they have simultaneously developed during this Gupta rule. And there are many regional rulers, there are many regional commanders, they have taken this style of execution to different levels. So, it is not really that one can call this is the classical style and after that whatever came they have shown degradation.

So, this is contextual in its own right and this is appreciated for its own characteristic features, but that does not mean the ones which were created in the other context or during the other time period are any of less merit. So, this is how we find that how the use of stone has been incorporated for conveying different kinds of ideas about the details, the surface, the expression and the underlying philosophy, everything comes together by the means of making the Buddha image. Thank you.