

Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 25
Stone: Memorials, Architectural Remnants and Objects

Hello everyone. We are continuing our discussion the use of stone and in the last lecture, we have touched upon the use of granite stone for making the hero stones, the memorials. And as we see that the making of this hero stones with granite and basalt that had been practiced in the Deccan India and other parts of southern India for centuries. So, there are some more examples here.

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And first I will get into the meaning of the Sati stones. So, as we know that for the hero stones, we find heroic male members of the society whose heroic deeds are established by the means of these kind of memorial stones, which are placed at prominent sections of the neighbourhood and perhaps sometimes you also find them to be at the fringes of the city. And then, there are also the other kinds of stones and those are called the Sati stones.

And for Sati stone what we have that we find the women and the women who have sacrificed themselves after their husband's death. So, the Sati stones are not something that is dependent on the heroic deeds of the women, sometimes they are part of the heroic deeds of the women, but it is only about the married women and something they have also their association with their husband that if their husband has died and then woman decided to sacrifice their life.

So, that is how like they were considered to be the Sati. And Sati is also this practice, is not something that is specific to the Vijayanagara area or the Vijayanagara period that is from 14th century. So, this practice has already been there in parts of the Indian subcontinent among the Hindu women and that is something we find. So, for that reason here we have a Sati stone and that actually comes from Sancoale in Goa and perhaps it was made in 12th or 13th century, so that predates the Vijayanagara period.

And this is a Sati stone which has perhaps been made of basalt and what we see as part of the Sati stones, there are also some of the characteristic features if we think about the hero stones that if there are particular heroic figures that we find them. Then for the Sati stone, we also find there are few other characteristic features. So, in the Sati stone, sometimes we do not really see the face of the person who is considered Sati, but what we have there prominently featured is this right arm.

So, we see the right arm here and that is of the arm of the person who had committed sati. So, what we see here is this the right arm is bent at the elbow and then the palm is raised in the gesture of abhayamudra or the mudra or the gesture of reassurance. So, what we have here this particular abhayamudra that we have with this hand bend at the elbow is something that had become an established iconographical aspect of making the Sati stones.

So more than their face or any other part of the identity what we have here is this particular way in which the hand is raised and the hand is raised in a gesture that whoever had committed Sati they were believed to have brought blessings to the family which as we all know that these ideas are highly debated. So, for that reason, perhaps for this idea of bringing blessings to the community members and the family members.

That is the reason we find that the hand of this woman is raised as in the gesture of providing reassurance. Sometimes we also find that in the hand there is a lemon which is held between the fingers that is also a very established iconographical trade that we find in many of the Sati stones and they spread it across different parts of Deccan India. And also, what we find that the bangle in their hand is still present. So, those are some of the things we find as part of the Sati stone.

In addition to that, we sometimes find representation of the crescent moon and then sun. And this sun and the moon we find in this Sati stone as well as in the hero stones as a symbolic gesture of how sun and moon will stay on even after the humans would die. So, it is a kind of a sign of immortality. So that is how like placing the sun and the moon in the same plaque where the Sati or the hero is presented is a reminder how their heroic deed will be immortal, and they will be remembered by generations.

So apart from these kinds of things, we also sometimes find in the Sati stone, there are male members and perhaps the deceased husband of the Sati and they are placed with their Anjali hasta or like both hands joined together. So, these are some of the trades that we find as part of the Sati stone. And here also we find that there is perhaps a warrior figure in the lower register of the Sati stone and perhaps this is; it is not properly identified, but it seems that there is a Shiva Lingam that is also presented here.

And why we say that is because there are many of the other Sati stones and hero stones where the devotees or the people who have died they were identified as the worshipers of Shiva, either Shiva or Vishnu, and mostly Shiva we find, so for that reason we can also imagine that this warrior figure that we have here and then there is this other figure, perhaps a woman figure, perhaps a miniature version of the person who have or maybe an attendant figured that we have here, all of them are presented as part of the Sati stone.

So, in the Sati stone, in the hero stone, we usually find that there are registers of this kind of narrative. The main part of the narrative in a Sati stone will perhaps be this hand, this prominently raised hand and then there are other smaller sections and then there are the other narratives which are also made part of these stones. So, if this is the one we find from 12th and 13th century, perhaps sometime between 12th and 13th century.

And then there is this other hero stone that we have and that is also made of basalt and this one is also found from Goa in the 12th century. So, one can see what is going on in this hero stone here. So, again, we see this similar kind of structure like this rectangular plaque and which is kept vertically and those things are still there, then the moon and the sun, these two motifs, which we find them to be here in the Sati stone and many other hero stones, they are also presented here.

And then the registers of narrative like two registers of narrative what we have here, so all of them we find them to be similar to the other hero stones, the other Sati stones. But then when we also see the kind of execution that had taken place here, the execution is drastically different. So, you can see that both of these images were perhaps made in the similar region in the Goa area, both of them they utilized basalt stone.

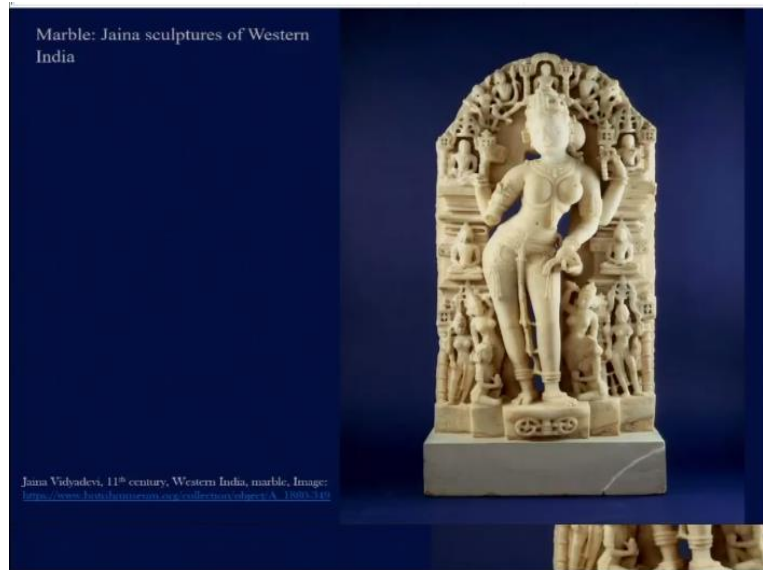
And then both of them they were, the other compositional arrangement and the shape of the stone and everything there are so many of the similarities, but when it comes to the execution that is drastically different. So, here all the figures, perhaps this is the figure that we see and he is placed on a high pedestal or a high seat with all attendant figures around this particular person and then with the umbrella on the top of his head suggesting his esteem presence in this particular setting whatever it is, perhaps it is a royal court.

And then all the entire narrative is also framed within these carved pillars. So, if this is what we find here and then perhaps this is the same person whom we find here to be fighting with like even perhaps fighting with the traders or with people who have arrived there in boat and that is the reason this figure has been shown in a heroic scale and then this boat which is part of the warfare is also shown here much more in a smaller scale.

So, these are some of that things we find that all these details which are incorporated as part of making these heroes stones, is quite different from the other ones the Sati stone that we have in the on the left side of the screen and many other things. So, that says something about the evolution of style the way we understand that if there are things which are crude they must be produced in an earlier time and then if there are things which are much more finer, then they must have been produced in a later time.

So, those ideas, we do not see them to be implemented here. Both of these things are produced at the same time, but perhaps for the royal patronage, perhaps for the degree of scale of the artisans and the kind of economical, status that the patrons they had. So, all of those things made a huge difference in terms of how the stone is treated and how that is moulded into these memorial stones.

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So from there, we will move on to another stone which we have here and that is the use of marble. And so the use of marble we find that to be mostly sort of concentrated in western India, part of Gujarat and Rajasthan. And as we know the places like Makrana those are the places which are known for producing marble and marble of Rajasthan has been of interest in the study of the temples and later on in many different kinds of structures.

So, here I will start the discussion by showing some of the images in the context of Jainism. Now, as we know in Jainism, we have two sects that is Digambara and Svetambara. So, the Digambara the ones who consider their ambara or the cloth to be the sky. So, they are the ones who are unclad and then sometimes we find them to only cover their mouth so that they do not allow the insects and stuff into the inner part of the body.

So, if this is something that we find for the Digambaras, and for the Svetambaras we find that they are clad in only plain white fabric and so that is something that we find the relationship between Jainism and this plain pristine white is something that had started from very early times. And so, this pristine white that does not have any blemish and how that not only talks about the absence of different kinds of opulence or absence of the colours or other kinds of details and also how white is related to spirituality.

So, all those different aspects we find that to be associated with white when we consider the Jaina art and that is something we also find that to be reflected in their choice of picking marble as their preferred medium of expression. So, at least from 9th and 10th century, we find many

different temples, the Jain temples in parts of Rajasthan, parts of Gujarat where superb, masterful use of marble had been displayed.

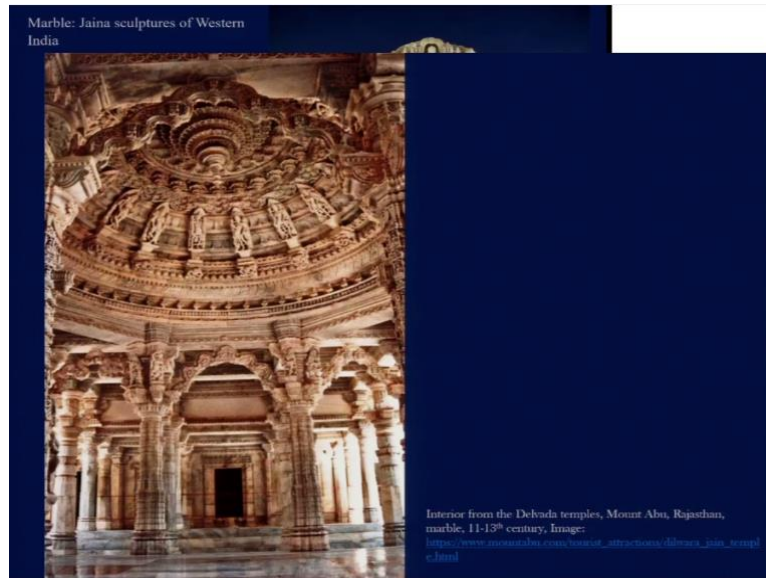
So, here once I will start the discussion with the sculpture instead of starting directly with the temple, what we see here in terms of the depiction, in terms of the use of the marble is that there is the Jaina Vidyadevi and we see the Vidyadevi who is standing in the centre of this high relief. And in this one, we see there is a frame or like a gateway like frame that is there which also sort of makes like a back still for Vidyadevi, and then the Vidyadevi's figure is executed in high relief.

And of course, there are the attendant figures that we find them to be on the sides and then there are devotee figures on both sides, so all those things are there. And then we also find there are the seated figures of Jaina tirthankaras by this side here and even here. So, there are those Jaina tirthankaras and then there are the divine figures. And then when we see that all of them are executed in marble, then this idea or their high significance of the white colour in the Jaina context that comes alive.

So, if we see some of the details those have also been done here, for example all the ornaments and the serenity, the peaceful appearance of the deity Vidyadevi and so all of them are sort of brought in conversation with the material. So, we see that Vidyadevi she holds an akshamala or a rosary and then there is also a depiction of a book or pustaka, a small book.

So, we have the association of the goddess with book and rosary and of course that also establishes her relationship to learning and spirituality and all of those things how they also are enhanced by the presence of marble.

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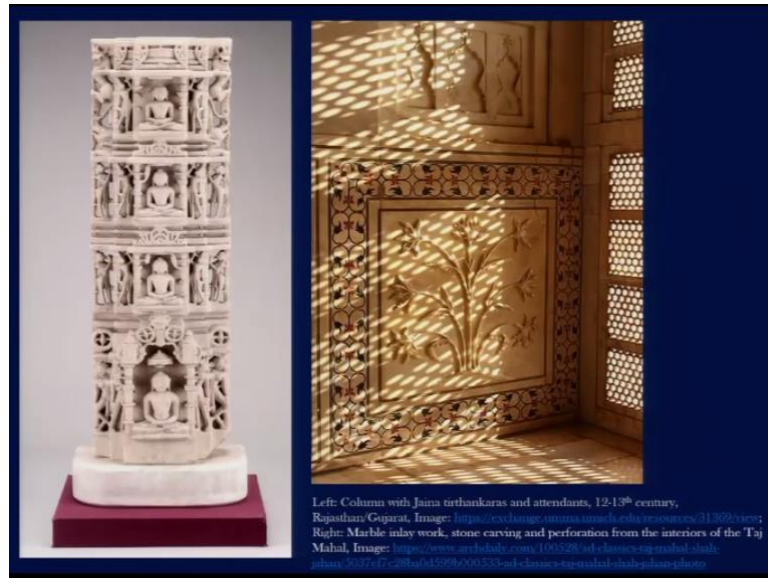


So, from there if we move on little further, we see that there are some of the temples, for example the Delvada temple in Mount Abu and then the Ranakpur temple complexes. So, there are some of this Jaina temple complexes, for example in Delvada and Ranakpur and part of Gujarat and in those one we find that there are superb carvings on marble. So, in one hand, we can see how marble is something that is for its pristine visual presence and its relationship to peace and then of course that spirituality.

All those reasons how marble was selected as a preferred medium of expression in this Jaina context. At the same time, we can also see that marble in the history has also been a material which is not which is of high economic value. So, the Jaina patrons they were responsible for erecting these temples or the sculptures here we find them that the Jaina patrons were wealthy enough to commission all these temples in marble.

And they could support this exquisite workmanship those are incorporated for making these pillars and this elaborately carved ceiling and everything else. So, in one hand we find the association of marble with spirituality with creating the serene atmosphere, but on the other hand we also find how the economic condition of the Jaina merchants and how that also contributed immensely to the making of this kind of elaborately carved structures.

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Left: Column with Jain tirthankaras and attendants, 12-13th century, Rajasthan/Gujarat. Image: <http://www.ancientindianart.com/ancientindianart/113099.html>; Right: Marble inlay work, stone carving and perforation, from the interiors of the Taj Mahal. Image: <http://www.ancientindianart.com/ancientindianart/113099.html>

Then I also wanted to do this comparison, so let us look into this image that we have on the left side of the screen. So, it is a column, it is a fragment of a column and it has perhaps been found from either Rajasthan or Gujarat and it was made some time between like 12th and 13th century and in this one again it is a column that shows the Jaina tirthankaras and here we have these four registers and within these registers in the central panel we have the seated tirthankaras. So, here we have this enshrined tirthankara here.

And within this architectural setting that replicates the temple form and then here on the all the upper storeys. So, there are these Jaina tirthankaras by the sides we have the male chauri-bearers and the female attendants and of course in the upper register we have the gaja vyala or this mythical animal that shows extraordinary power. So, those are the kinds of images that we see them to be depicted there, and then also there is tremendous amount of the perforated work that we can see.

That in which the stone has been carved to the extent that one can see the other side through the carvings of the stone. So, this is another degree of making this relief carving and this particular idea of perforation, we find something that was already present in the 12-13th century and then we see that to appear in a very different context when we see how perforation in marble was incorporated in some of the Mughal monuments, for example Taj Mahal.

So, we do not really make these kinds of associations usually and that is because that our studies are bound by the chronology or like certain kinds of the religions or the cultural context, but it is important for us also to have a look at this. The material characteristics of some of these

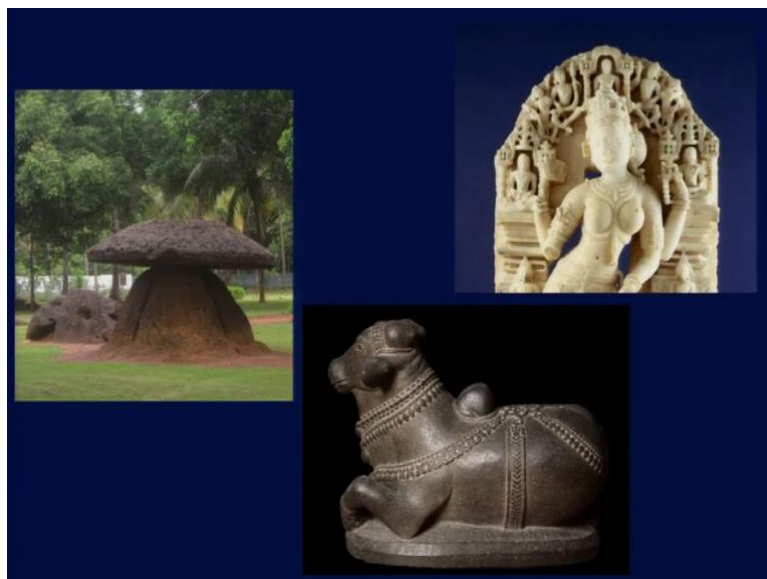
things which were possible in the marble carving in the 12-13th century, this particular way in which this perforation took place and how those perforations in a much more geometric scale were incorporated in making Taj Mahal.

And so, these kinds of associations if we can make then we see that how some of the material characteristics, those things were not really removed when the same material was used in different contexts that can be different cultural contexts, that can be different religious context. There is also something very interesting that if we consider this pristine white material that had to do with spirituality, that had to do with the heavenly presence of the Jaina tirthankaras.

And of course, the other deities, then this particular character of this pristine white material was also something that was also the reason why this pristine white material was used in some of the later Mughal monuments to have this connection with the heavenly realm to evoke spirituality, like for example if we see that in Taj Mahal as well. So, these kinds of things, I will stress on this issue.

Because see that how the use of marble and then its connection to spirituality, its connection to the peace and everything else, those things remain unchanged. And if we make the connection between these different kind of art objects or structures from different cultural backgrounds and also from different time periods, we can see how this is not really irrelevant to make these comparisons.

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So from there, I would like to just wrap it up the session and just to remind us of some of the characteristic features of stone and how those were incorporated as part of the different kinds of material culture and social practices. So, initially we have looked into some of the structures and some of the tools which are the prehistoric tools the ones which were found sometime between 1000 BC to 500 AD.

So, for example the one we have here which is also called the kudakkal, this is particular form of memorial that we found in Kerala and that makes use of the locally available laterite stone which is highly porous and of course that gives its particular kind of visual presence to it. So, this reddish laterite stone that we have here in this part of the country and how that was used for making these early memorial structures.

So, this is certainly immovable, this is certainly something that we do not wish to carry it with us at home, but then there are also the stone objects. So for example, if we consider one of this Nandi bull sculpture that we have seen, this statue here and the miniature versions of the figures of deity or the figures of their mount and so on, so those we find them to be much more portable and they were taken to people's homes or as have placed them in the temples.

So, there are different ways in which we find the objects which are made of stone they were incorporated. So, there are the ones which are immovable, there are the objects which are movable. And of course, the movable objects will also incorporate different kinds of utilitarian items like the ones we used for cooking and different kinds of pots and different kinds of tools for grinding grains and everything else.

So, those are the ones we also find how the same stone is made into this these objects of daily use, whereas the same stone is used for making the images of the deities and so on. So, these are the different kinds of ways in which we find that how the both the immovable and the portable items are made of stone. And then we have also looked into some of the characteristic features that how the characteristic features of the white marble differ from the other stones like for example granite or of the Mathura sandstone and so on.

So, those are the kinds of things that we have looked at that how the colour, the appearance and everything else they contribute immensely to not only the visual presence, but also all the other metaphorical associations or the symbolic associations that the stones evoke, so the stone

objects they evoke. So, this is how that once we be more aware or conscious about the material and what kind of material we are looking at, if that is smooth, if that is hard.

If that is soft and what kind of textured the material has and how all those things contribute to the way we understand the art objects, the way we understand the life around us. So, those things become much more contextual and we not only just see these objects as part of the history or something that we have studied in the past, something that we study from the past, but this this also becomes seamlessly incorporated in our daily lives.

Once we see different kinds of objects which are made of stone even today, then we also start to understand their material characters and how that either inspires the artisans or how that helped the artisans to model them in particular ways. And as I have also mentioned that all these materials alongside their possibility, they also have the limitations. So, understanding both these characters for any material is very important.

And that is something we find to be established and celebrated in all the art objects and all the objects that we have studied as part of this week. And also, another thing is important. When we consider the use of material, it is also important for us to see the material perhaps sometimes outside of a particular chronological framework or a particular cultural background and see that how one particular material is used in different kinds of expressions.

And how the social setting, cultural setting and economical condition they make the difference instead of linear flow of the styles. So, those are also some of the things that we have looked into as part of this week's lecture. Thank you.