

Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 6

Hello everyone, I am Rajarshi Sengupta and we are here in this course Indian art And today we will be looking into the module 2 or the week 2 and where we are looking at the architecture one. So, there will be 2 modules or 2 weeks on architecture and this is the first week on our study in Indian architecture. So, in this first week we will be looking into the basics of Buddhist and Jain architecture and in the second part of this module on architecture we will be looking at the Hindu architecture.

So, the basics of the Buddhist and Jain architecture that actually entails a brief understanding of how Buddhism and Jainism that had developed in the Indian subcontinent and their long-lasting effect on Indian architecture that we see today. So...we will be, as part of this weekly lectures, we will be covering mostly the Buddhist architecture and towards the end we will be getting into the basics of Jain architecture.

So, starting with the Buddhist architecture, we know that I mean Buddha, the Gautama Buddha or Prince Siddhartha, who was responsible for starting this new religion that we see in the Indian subcontinent, it happened in the.. around 600 BC. Now, before that we can imagine that there is a gap between 1900 BC that we have looked into the Indus valley sites and something that is happening in the 600 BC.

So, in between this time which is also considered to be the Vedic period in which we see there are not too many of the material evidences and there are also pottery shreds which are found from some of those sites, for example in various sites in Haryana, in parts of Uttar Pradesh, in Rajasthan and so on. In those places, we have found some of the pottery shreds and some of the terracotta made material from the post Indus valley times which are being believed to be part of this Vedic times.

So, during this time what we find is that there was worship of some of the gods who are personification of different forces of nature, for example the thunderstorm and rain those were associated with the Hindu god Indra. And then we also find the gods such as Varuna and Surya,

the sun being the Surya and then Varuna being the God of water and waterways. So, they have emerged as some of the very important gods during this time period which is also understood as the Vedic time.

And the reason for which we do not really have much of the material evidences from the sites... from this time is because it is believed that they have prioritized ways in which simplistic living and then making small brick structures and making small mud structures as houses and for conducting yagna or the sacrificial rites and so on. So, those were conducted during this time, which did not really have a tremendous amount of material presence in the Indian subcontinent.

So, that is the reason we do not have much material evidences from those times. So, after this time, what we find in the Vedic, the customs, the Vedic ideology that also stressed on the division of different people and the community, which started from dividing people according to their role or responsibilities in the society which also sort of manifested into this very complicated caste system.

And then this caste system was opposed by some of the people, for example the Ajivikas and then the most prominent one perhaps would be Gautama Buddha or Prince Siddhartha. So, some of these rituals that those were established during the Vedic times that we find to be a point for us to understand that why Buddha's intervention was such an important one. So Buddha, he encouraged equality and he also encouraged different dissolving of this hierarchy and this caste systems, which are so much prominent in the Vedic times.

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So, in those aspects what we find that this one particular prince who was born in the city of Kapilavastu in the Southern Nepal in the today's nation state of Nepal that we find there, so became...who was also raised as prince Siddhartha. So, he became such an important part of all these transactions. So, prince Siddhartha in his journey of seeking what is truth, what is truth beneath what all we see in this material world.

So, in this journey he started and then he explored various different paths as including learning from different gurus from the Brahminical and the Hindu customs, then from ... also learning from the Ajivikas and the ones who did not believe in any religion at all. And from learning and comparing from all these different sources, then finally he came up with this idea of the middle path.

And the middle path was also possible during his enlightenment and that happened in the sight of Bodh Gaya in today's state of Bihar. So, in Bodh Gaya, he had attended enlightenment. And this particular moment when he attended enlightenment became such an important part in not only in the history, but also in the history of art because that encouraged different ways in which we understand architecture, ways in which we understand the idea of the body and so on.

So, that is something we will be studying as part of our exploration of Buddhist architecture and art. Now, just to give us a sense of which area we are talking about mostly, so in the map on the left side of the screen we have of course in the Southern Nepal which is also bordering Northern parts of Bihar, from there we find the Kapilavastu is the city from where prince Siddhartha who would become Buddha had started his journey.

From there, he had travelled to different sites, mostly in Bihar that we find that there are four sites which are the most important ones that we consider to be part of the Buddhist preaching and religion. And that will be the first one is of course Kapilavastu or the garden of Lumbini where he was born, and then the other one will be Bodh Gaya where he attended enlightenment. And so from there, he travelled to the city of... he travelled to the site of Sarnath which is right outside of this historical city of Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh today.

So he travelled there to Sarnath and by the bank of the river Ganges or Ganga, he preached his first sermon. So that is the reason that is also a place which has been very important in the

Buddhist belief as well as in the Buddhist art and architecture. And then the next important site for Buddha will be the site where he attended nirvana or where he left his earthly body and that will be the place Kushinagar that is again situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh today.

So, there are all these four important moments in Buddha's life is celebrated and then those also became a reference for later day architects and artisans and so on for making these structures. And on the right side of the screen, we have a representation of Gautama Buddha and there are many different ways in which we find Gautama Buddha is represented and one of the most celebrated one we find is to be in this cross-legged position.

And this cross-legged position or this yogic posture is also something that we can relate to what we have studied in the Indus valley context that how this cross-legged position is considered to be this yogic posture and why that is also something that made us think about the figures who are represented, the male figures were represented in the Indus valley seals to be the yogic figures.

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So, this is the site we have been talking about that is Bodhi Gaya that we see on screen and this particular tree... this particular tree that had been considered to be the tree under which prince Siddhartha, he sat down and he attended enlightenment. And when he attended enlightenment, then he became Buddha. And when he attended enlightenment, it is believed that he touched the ground or the mother earth with his right arm.

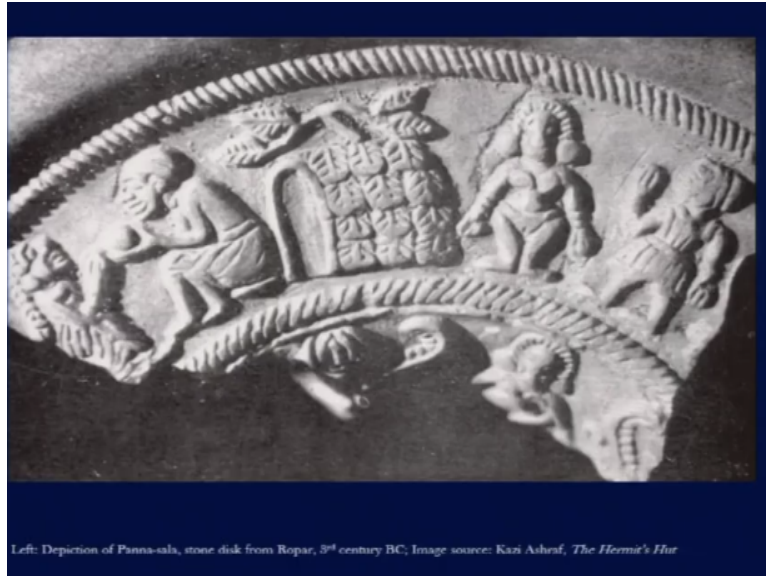
And then that was the particular moment in which he announced that he had attended enlightenment and he asked the mother earth to be the evidence. To bear the evidence that he had attended enlightenment and that is one of these gestures that we find that it became very important in the Buddhist art and that is this particular way in which he had touched the ground that is called bhūmisparśha mudra and that is touching the earth gesture.

And then also what we find that under this tree there was a particular seat, which marks the space where Buddha himself had sat down and then attended enlightenment. So, that particular area was then later on developed by the later kings and so on and among them perhaps the emperor Ashoka, we will come to more details about emperor Ashoka, but he apparently installed this one seat that was made of stone that we find later in the lower half of our slide.

And this seat which was installed, it is believed to be installed by emperor Ashoka, which is still there that we can see on the left side of the image, which is now being enthroned and that is a sacred site for all Buddhist and people across religion. And in the later times, we also find that temples and other architecture those were erected around this area, but the Bodhi Gaya temple is not something that we find to be included in the early depiction of Buddhist art and architecture.

For which we will be talking about some of the early architectural records and some of the ideas which also made a huge impact how we understand art and architecture in the Buddhist context. So, in the Buddhist context, something we find to be very important that there are different kinds of materials which are used, for example, stone, wood and so on.

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And there was also an understanding of having body as an architecture or body as a house. So, the house that contains the soul, the house that also contains intellect and everything else. So, this is something that became very much important for Buddha to understand that their larger implication not only in the material world, also in the spiritual context for which after he had attended enlightenment.

He had considered that this body or this house is destroyed and then the enlightened body is something that comes out of the destruction. So, for that reason there is this idea of destroying the superficial structures and making something that is relevant in the Buddhist context that we find and for those reasons Buddha never really encouraged making houses or structures which will be made as temples or for recreational purposes.

So, something that we have seen for example that he had spoken about that the living structures. So for example, if there are living rocks, the rock shelters and places like them, if there are already abandoned houses, if there are shelters which are made by tree and so on, those are the places where people should live. The people who are the followers of Buddha's path should select those places instead of erecting houses or instead of erecting architecture.

So, this is something that we find to be very much prominent in the early days of Buddhism, but this idea that one can also imagine that how this idea might also not go well with how we understand architecture, then how to this idea of destroying an architecture making this newly erected body and of course this newly constructed body and these things go with architecture.

So, in some of the historical context, we have found that Buddha had spoken about the shelters, which are taken during monsoon.

And this is also another reason why I wanted to speak about the map, the most important sites in Buddha's life. Because after he attended enlightenment and after he preached his first sermon, he had encouraged all his followers, all the Buddhist monks to travel across the country and then also preach the Buddha's teachings. And this is something that had happened that when people travel from one place to another.

Perhaps this idea of the architecture does not really come very prominently there, but during the monsoon then there needs to be a shelter for all the people and this is not only for protecting the monks and the nuns from the heavy monsoon rain, but also some of the other things that come with the monsoon are the insects, the snakes and so on. So, the people also need to be protected from that.

And that is the first evidence we find that how some of the build structures were finally being established during Buddha's lifetime and that is to protect the people from the rains, the tropical monsoon. And we know that how this part of India, in the north and eastern part of India, how the monsoon is really heavy. For that reason, protecting people from monsoon should not seem as a surprise.

Now, when Buddha had also agreed with making architecture, we find that he had also come in agreement with making architecture which will be used by the community and not by some individual, which will serve purposes for education, for worship and all these meditational purposes, but not for recreation and so on. So, those are some of the ideas we find to be very much ingrained in the Buddhist thought and philosophy which also made a huge deal of impact in terms of how we understand architecture in the Buddhist context.

Now, coming back to what were the references for Buddha to start thinking about the role of architecture and some of the early material evidences that we find and this one that we have on screen. So, this is a depiction of a parnasala or house which is made of leaves. So, we can see on the screen that there is a medallion and in this medallion are a stone disc which is found from Ropar in Northern India and this came from third century BC.

So, these are some of the early examples. This can be either Buddhist or it can be of other religious beliefs that includes Hinduism, that includes the Ajivikas or someone else. And here what we find very prominently featured in this stone disc is this small, very simple hut like structure which is made of leaves. So, if we see the structure, there is a doorway for people to go inside, but it does not really allow too many people to go inside.

And this is perhaps an ascetic's heart or a hermit's heart. And then what we find here is this entire heart is made from perhaps some kind of structure, a simple structure made from the branches of a tree or bamboo or so on and then that is also something that we find that is right under a tree which is only shown in fragment on the top of this parnasala. And the body of the parnasala or this temporary house or this temporary heart that is made of leaves.

And the leaves we can see those are arranged in rows and they have been put together for making this particular structure. So, this is a kind of structure that we find to be the simplest mode of accommodation which will give shelter to the people like the ascetics, monks and so on. And that is something those were also in mind of Buddha when he envisioned that people should not be spending too much of effort in making architecture.

However, we see with time that there have been many changes in terms of how architecture, the idea of architecture had progressed. Now, some of the things that we find to be very interesting is that how Buddha's enlightenment had also made a huge deal of impact on how architecture is perceived. So, when Buddha attained enlightenment, it is believed that the top of his head that made a projection and it is sort of like grew outward.

So, there was a bump that was created on the top of his head and in many of the images, for example the one we have seen in the first image for this lecture, in this one if we can see that there is a projection on the top of Buddha's head that is not really a hairdo but this is actually this wisdom bump that was created after his enlightenment. So, this projection on the top of his head is something that is a marker of his newly formed body as he had said that the material body has been destroyed.

And after he attained enlightenment or bodhi, then there is this body that was newly constructed. So, these are some of the markers of how this body he perceived to be new from the earlier ones. And apart from that, there were some of the other things which have also been

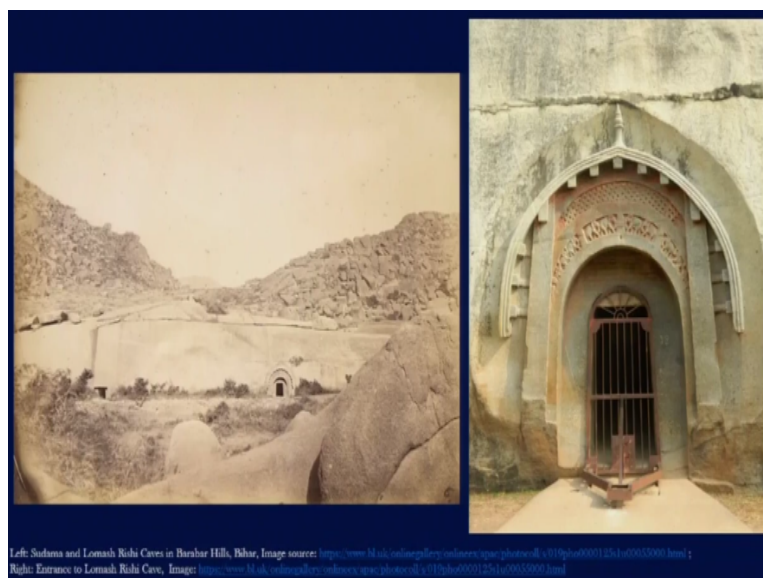
part of his enlightenment. We find that there is this sign that how in the forehead right in between the two eyebrows, there is this one particular tiny dot that is created there.

And this is a sign which has been told that there were those flocks of eyebrows and which is also can be considered to be unibrow that was there for Buddha. It is also something that we find to be part of his iconography as well as the standards of beauty in various Indian literature and so on. So, this particular feature of Buddha that was later being represented as a dot or Aurobindo, so which is also in some cases that can be confused with the idea of a third eye in the Hindu context.

So, these are some of the features we find to be part of his body, which also marked his engagement with the greater truth of the universe as well as his enlightenment. So, from there if we move to this idea of how that also made an impact on the architecture that we find to be in various degrees. So, the first thing first that we find that how some of the ideas that he carried with, some of the structures which are already existing in nature.

How to use them or how the monks can actually inhabit there without putting too much effort in building a place from the scratch. So, that is something that had encouraged having those rock cut shelters.

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And these are some of the examples that we have on screen. So, for example the Sudama and Lomas Rishi cave that we have in the Barabar hills in Bihar. So, those are some of the structures from like third and second century BC. So, they come as some of the earliest build structures

in the entire Indian subcontinent that we find today. And these are some of the structures as we have already discussed that Buddha had encouraged utilizing living rock structures and so on.

And so that is how perhaps the monks from when we see the Lomas Rishi cave or from Sudama cave. In Sudama cave, we cannot really confirm whether it started by the Buddhist or there were other monks and ascetics from different belief systems they had inhabited there or not. And so there were parallel developments in this kind of activities and these ideas about use utilizing the natural rock shelters.

And what we find that the simplistic doorways were made perhaps by the kings and the merchants for having spiritual merit to help the monks and ascetics and the nuns to have spiritual merit, so that their afterlife can be secured. So, those ideas also prompted the kings and merchants and the wealthy part of the society to contribute to making these kinds of structures. And this is also something that we find to be some of the early examples of how stone was utilized for making these structures.

Because if we consider that what we have seen earlier in the Harappan context that there was use of brick, there was use of mud structures and so on. And if we also consider that what we have seen in this parnasala that of course that comes in terms of the simple material which are used around people and then those are utilized by ascetics, but then what happens in this caves that the use of stone also announces a different development in this context of architecture.

And what are the different developments that we find? If we have a closer look at the entrance to the Lomas Rishi cave that is there on the right side of the image, we find this trefoil arch, the arch which has this slightly pointed apex and then this particular arch that is also supported by wooden brackets that we find which are supporting this arch. So, if we consider that what kind of brackets these are, these are mostly decorative.

And then they do not really support the arch because it is carved out of stone. So, it also came to signify that this kind of architecture perhaps had been already existing in wood and wood requires brackets to support the arches for supporting the gateways, something that is not required in stone. So, these are some of the early examples in which we find that even though these are made in stone, but they actually have some of the references to how architecture was made in wood.

And if you ask that what is the significance of this particular trefoil arch, this arch also had a huge importance in terms of Buddha's enlightenment. When there was this projection on the top of his head, so it is believed that the regular doorways and the regular ceiling cannot really accommodate him. So there needs to be a way in which like his projection on the top of his head can be accommodated.

And that is how this arch like structures they came into existence or that is how this arch like structures that came as a reminder of Buddha's enlightenment and the projection on the top of his head. So that is how we also find how this particular arch like structure became so much ingrained in the early Buddhist architecture.