

Indian Art: Materials, Techniques and Artistic Practices
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Lecture – 16

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Hello everyone. I am Rajarshi Sengupta. And we will be continuing our course on Indian art. And today we will be going into our module 4 and week 4 and that is architecture 2. So, we have already covered architecture 1 in which we have looked into the basics of Buddhist and Jain architecture. And today we will be looking into Hinduism and temple building.

So, in module 4 or in the week 4, we will be looking into the details of Hindu idea of architecture as well as sculpture and so on and that sort of how that gives an idea between the deities, the devotees, the architecture, the spaces around us and the materials which are incorporated usually as part of worship. Now, in terms of Hinduism, there are certain characteristic features that we need to first get into.

And those are the things that how Hinduism does not really have one founding figure, but there are multiple figures or multiple sources from which these ideas or these ways of life have emerged. So, unlike the kinds of religions we have looked into, for example Buddhism and Jainism, we know from where they have started. For example, Buddhism has started from one particular person who is known as Gautama Buddha or Buddha the Shakyamuni.

And then for Jainism, we have looked into a number of tirthankaras, there are 24 tirthankaras and the last person was a contemporary of Shakyamuni Buddha. So, unlike those we see that in terms of the Hindu practices, we do not really know that from where it started or if that had started from multiple sources at the same time. And that is the reason we see from the very beginning there is multiplicity in the conception of Hinduism as well as the way the practices have been carried out.

So, from the very early beginning, we see that there are many ways in which Hindu practices have evolved. And in terms of the deities, we find there are multiple deities who have been worshipped. And so based on the communities, we find that some deities are preferred by certain communities, whereas the other deities are preferred by the others. And for these communities, we find that whoever their respected deities are they are considered to be the supreme energy in the universe.

And that is perhaps one of the prime characteristics of Hinduism that we do not really see that there is only one way of being, but there are multiple. And that is also something that adds to the ideas, that also something that adds to the way in which architecture and sculpture they have been modelled over time. Now, after the Indus valley period, if we see that what are the ways in which we have certain evidences.

So, we see that after the Indus valley period between 1500 BC and 500 BC, it seems like there have been these ideas about enshrining the deities, something that have not really been there before that. So, it can be imagined that the absence of the specific Hindu deities in terms of their figurative expression or figurative idols or images that perhaps explains because that perhaps relates to the Vedic practices or the practices in which the deities were evoked through the sacrificial fire.

And different kinds of rituals which did not really require making images or making sculptures. So that kind of abstracted practices in which we find in the in the Vedic period, which is understood as the post Indus valley period. During this time, we find that there are practices where the sacrificial fire was created in this square yagna hymns or like the places where the brick altars were made and in which yagna or the sacrificial rites were performed.

So, again we are going back to some of these ideas of brick and use of terracotta and perhaps those are also some of the reasons for which we do not really find substantial amounts of evidences from these times. However, some of the literary sources or some of the hymns of Vedas they tell us about such kind of practices. Now as I have mentioned earlier that we find that between 1500 BC and 500 BC sometime during this time the idea of enshrining deities that had emerged in the Hindu practices.

And that is the character that sort of gave rise to making of temples. So, during this time, we also find from the very early times in Hinduism there have been a tendency towards worshipping nature and different forces of nature. So, for example if we see the thunderbolt and thunderstorm and then how those are related to the monsoon and then monsoon eventually relates to architecture and prosperity.

So, those are the reasons we find that thunderbolt becomes one of the weapons or a particular attribute towards god Indra who was considered to be one of the prime gods during this formative period of Hinduism. Now, apart from that we also find there are other deities, for example that the sun god, the sun being the source of our lives, so that is something that is a very important element of our lives and livelihood and everything else.

And that is the reason we find that sun god had also been very important part of the Hindu worships. Now, similarly we also find that there are many other forces of nature, for example water and many other things, for example air and so on. They have also been considered to be the deities or how they have also been worshipped by the people. Now, with that we see towards the end of this time period like as I have mentioned that between 1500 BC and 500 BC.

So towards the end of this time period, perhaps closer to 500 BC and so on, there have been a rise of the three new gods and they were considered to be this new Hindu Trinity. So, they moved slightly away from the way the god Indra, the king of the gods, the way they have been considered and now the Hindu Trinity we find to be Shiva, Brahma and Vishnu. So, these three gods came to be considered as the Hindu Trinity and they were related to the process of creation, sustainment and destruction.

So, Brahma was the one who was considered to be related to creation whereas Vishnu is the one who has been considered as the nourisher or sustainer and then we know as the god Shiva

who is related to the idea of destruction. And through this, we also find that there is not really a linear flow of time which has been attributed here, but this is a cyclical flow. So, it starts from creation, goes into sustainment and then to destruction.

But the destruction makes a way for this new creation and that is how the cycle of life and death continues. And that is also one of the reasons in which we find that in Hindu philosophy, there is this idea about birth and rebirth, which also corresponds to the formation of these deities and the overall philosophy which shapes the Hindu ideas. Now, from there if we think about the evidences, the sculptural evidences or the architectural remains that we find from the very early times.

So some of the very early images that we find and which can be specifically attributed to the Hindu gods and goddesses those will be perhaps the one we have on screen in the left side and that is the Shiva Lingam at Gudimallam in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. So, this is a replica of the actual image that we have here and here what we find in this particular image there is a vertically erect male genitalia, which is also called lingam.

And there is the figure who holds a weapon in his left arm and he also holds an animal in his right arm and then he stands on the top of a demon like figure later on which could also be considered as the demon of ignorance Apasmara. So, what we find here is a very interesting kind of amalgamation of the fertility related images, at the same time how the symbolism of fertility and then the role of the deities they come together in this image.

So, there is not really an implicit, but an explicit depiction of a male genitalia that we can find here and that is vertical and then in the body of this male genitalia, we have the image of this person. So, this person for its relationship to this lingam like shape, so that is the reason he is considered to be one of the early forms of god Shiva. And then if you also see the kind of railing that it surrounds the figure and this is there.

This railing and this figure is kind of sunken in the garbhagriha or the womb chamber of this temple in Gudimallam. And if you see the railing, the railing also follows something like the post the bars and the column like formation which we have already seen in the fencing of Sanchi and Bharhut. So, this figure, this particular Shiva Lingam at this temple of Gudimallam this is considered to be built somewhere between 3rd century and 2nd century BC.

Which comes very close to the period when the Bharhut stupa and later on the Sanchi stupa was built. So, we can imagine that how certain ideas for example the way in which this fencing has been made and if we also get into the details of the figure in which like the way the ornaments are depicted, the way the overall expression of the face and the body they have been constructed, all of them be at higher resemblance to the ones we have seen in Sanchi as well as in Bharhut and so on.

So, it is again a reminder for all of us to think that even though there are different religions we are talking about, but the artistic expressions are not distinct from each other. So, one religion would borrow from the other and there are always transactions and there are always exchanges between these religions that had happened in the past. So, if this is one of the prime deities that we find or some of the early figures of Lord Shiva had appeared in Southern India.

Then some of the other figures will be there, for example the one we have on the right side of the screen and this is a head of Goddess Uma or Goddess Durga and this is a massive bust of Goddess Uma or Goddess Durga, which was found from Ghazni in Afghanistan. So, that also says something about how the religions and identities were not really marked by the kind of the geographical places that we understand as the Indian subcontinent or the country of India today.

Now what we also find there in this particular figure, the bust of Goddess Uma, that comes from perhaps second century or third century AD, so much later from the one which we have looked into in the slide in the left. However, we also see if we consider the kind of the style of making this figure and also like the way the hair has been made, and then the eyes, and of course the ornaments and everything else they bear a high resemblance to the Bodhisattva images that we have studied so far.

And so that that also says something about these common aesthetic choices and the aesthetic decisions the sculptors and the artisans they have made during this time period at the same time in these regions, which gave rise to this aesthetic quality of the Gandharan sculptures which persisted not only in one religion but in many. Now, another important thing it might be that some time we do not have a particular time frame to suggest that when it started.

But we also see that during this time, perhaps in the first millennium BC or so on we also see that how the cult of the Goddess or the worshipers of the goddess they have considered the goddess, like for example the goddess Durga or goddess Uma and so on, they to be the supreme power of the universe instead of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma. So that also gave rise to the tantric practices in which we find the supremacy of the goddess and not the gods.

So, we have the Vedas and the Tantras, both are simultaneously developing during these times. From there if we go a little further into the visual expressions and how images were considered, at the same time how these expressions shaped the belief system in which we find that there are certain things which are much more abstracted. So, for example if we start with the idea that how in Hinduism the idea of the entire universe or the cosmos had been constructed.

So there is this idea of Brahmanda or this Brahmanda comes from this particular egg which is called Hiranyagarbha in which there is a golden egg and from which we find that egg had exploded and then the entire creation had come into being. And this this particular explosion that we find there is something that is related to Brahma's did of creation. So, it expanded and that is how different elements came into being and the multiplicity and the complexity of all the living beings and the non-living beings came into existence, so that is how it has been constructed.

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Now, for those abstracted notions we find that in Hindu visual culture or in Hindu art, there are both ways of expressions. So, if we consider the image on the left side of our screen, there is this abstracted Shiva lingam and if we see that Shiva lingam, there is this small linga or this

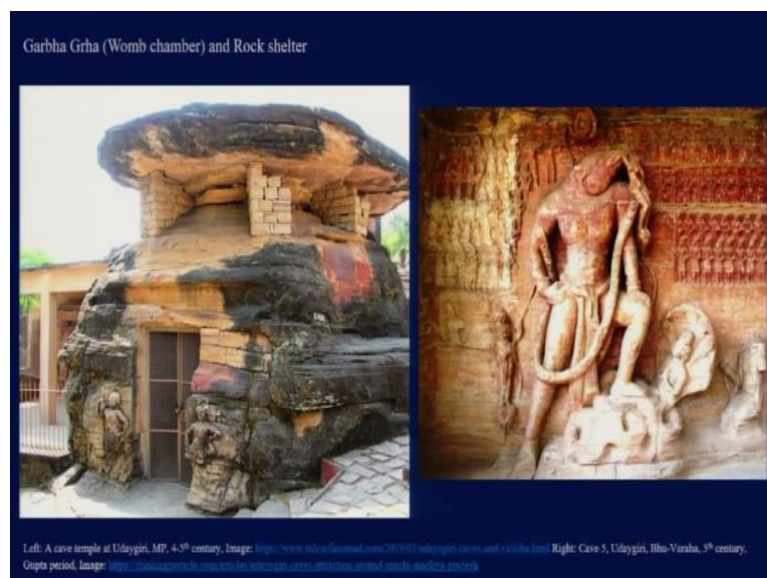
male genitalia which has been depicted on this high pedestal. Now, this pedestal if we see it very closely, there is a square base for this lingam.

And the square base is a symbolic representation of the yoni or the female genitalia and it has been considered how prakriti or the female genitalia comes in and then the union between prakriti and purusha and the purusha is something that is symbolized by the male genitalia here. So, the union between them are integral to any acts of creation. So, that is something that we also find to be embedded in this abstracted formation of the Shivalinga.

If we think this is one abstracted expression of this really developed philosophy, on the other hand we also find expressions. For example, we have a Mukhalingam in which we find there is an image of Lord Shiva which is projected out of this abstracted linga shape and that comes from fifth century Mathura. And so in this one, we see that how there is a kind of an in between stage where the figurative representation of Shiva that comes in contact with the abstracted idea of a lingam.

So, there are as I have already mentioned there is not really one way of looking into these images, but there are multiple ways and so that is the reason we find that high narrative expressions and Hindu art, at the same time there can also be like highly abstracted expressions, So, both these things are possible.

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So, from there if we move little further to the kind of the structures and the architecture, they mark the early stage of the Hindu building practices and in which we find that again we are

going back to some of the natural structures of the living rock structures. So, for example we find that there had been this idea about how this particular idea about enshrining the beloved deities or the deities whom we worship, so to make a house for them.

This is a particular idea that we find it is slightly different from or perhaps a bit different from the way we have seen in the Jain and in the Buddhist philosophy. So, in the structures in Buddhism and Jainism, we found that there was a prevalence towards the structures such as monastery, viharas and chaityas like the places where everyone gathers and they worship or like the monasteries which is predominantly used by the monks, the nuns and the ascetics.

Here we find that there is a slightly different approach towards building a house for the gods and that is that there are two concepts coming together. The first one is the house of the gods is something that is understood as the house which is inhabited by the high royals are the kings and the gods are the considered as the kings of the kings.

So, that is the reason what we find here is that the structures which were erected or even the ones which are carved out of the rock shelters or the living rock structures, they all have been considered to be a symbolic representation of a prasada or a palace like a complex. Then the other important part of these temples we find in terms of architectural metaphors is this particular womb chamber.

Now, the womb chamber is the one that has been understood and as all the lives they start from the mother's womb. So, the womb chamber is something that is considered to be the most sacred space where the deity figures are installed and the womb chamber is usually a dark small space where there will only be one entrance or one way to go inside. And it also does not really allow many people to go inside these places.

So, really secluded, really exclusive space which is dark and which sort of evokes the sense of a womb. So, that is the womb chamber we find that is also something very important part of the Hindu temples. So, as I have said the entire structure of the temple might also resemble the prasada or the palace complexes, but the main part or the part where the deity figures are installed that is something that is related to the mother's womb or the womb chamber which is also called in Sanskrit as garbhagriha.

So, what we find in some of the early examples, the womb chamber like this particular rock shelter like formation that actually comes together with the actual living rocks. So, for example as we have seen here there is a cave temple here on the left side of the screen and that is in Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh. So, in the earlier module or in the week, we have already studied that the Udayagiri in the Buddhist context and which comes from Odisha, but here we are looking into Udayagiri which is from Madhya Pradesh.

And in Madhya Pradesh what we find here that there are the series of caves which were excavated during fourth to fifth century, which is also the time period of the Guptas, so which is considered to be, which has significantly contributed to the making of Indian art and architecture. And during this time period, we find how the sandstone caves were excavated and so some of the examples.

For example, the one we see on the left side of the screen in which we find how this living rock structure had actually been carved in such a way that it resembles this temple like forms, the temples that we are most habituated to look at today. And then there are the guardian figures by the entrance gateway to the sanctum sanctorum. And so there are some of this simple formation of the temple that we find that how this simple forms they started being called as the temple.

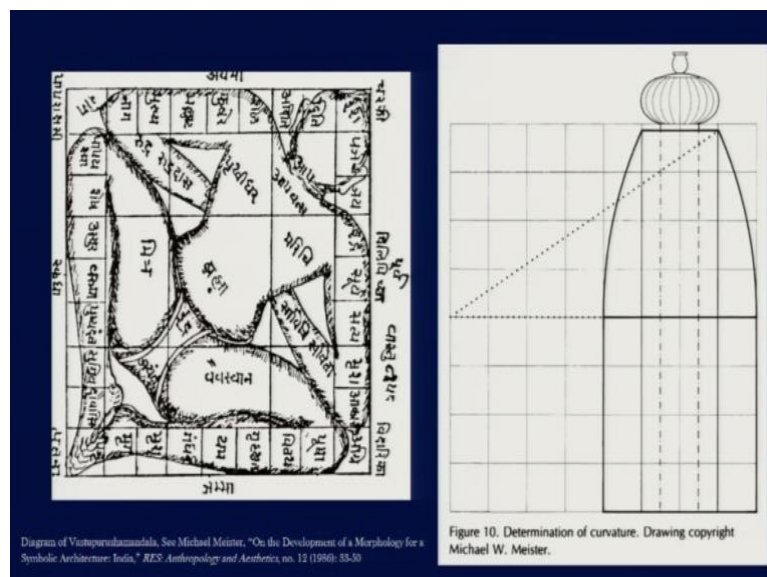
So, the main areas in a temple those will be the garbhagriha or the womb chamber and then the entire structure resembles prasada or a palace complex. Now, how this prasada comes into being that we will be discussing little more in the next image. And from there, I also wanted to show that how there are those rock cut sculptures. So, the architecture cannot really be separated from this rock cut sculptures because there is not really a distinction there in this time period, until 19th century we do not really see that kind of distinction.

So, what we have here; this is also a high relief in which the images are carved almost in three dimensional quality except for its back which is attached to the wall of this living rock structures. And in this one, we find that there is the boar incarnation or the Varaha incarnation of Lord Vishnu who is represented in this particular image and he is seen here to be rescuing the Bhudevi or earth goddess.

So, this is something we find that I mean slowly how the temple structures that start having this divisions in which like there is this exclusive the womb chamber within which there is a dark chamber and there not really too many activities can happen inside it. And then there are other areas of this particular temple complexes or areas where the devotees can see the great deeds of the gods. So, in one hand we have these highly figurative narrative expressions.

On the other hand, we have this very exclusive space only for the devotees to go there and to perform their homage or their whatever rites in seclusion. So, these two things, even though they seem like these ideas are distinct from each other, but they are also performed side by side the way I have already explained that how Hinduism from the very beginning it thrived on the idea of multiplicity and not really like one way or the other, but many things at the same time.

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Now, from there if we get into the details about how the architectural spaces are constructed, in this particular as part of the Hindu temples, we find that noted scholar Michael Meister had elaborated on this issue and his analysis also had brought up some of the ways in which the ground plans of these temples were laid out. And one of the very efficient ways in which to look at these ground plans will be to consider the idea of Vastu Purusha Mandala.

And Vastu Purusha mandala is the particular mandala or the ground plan that we have on the left side of the screen in which we find that there is this square space which had been divided in many other squares. And usually, I must say that there are many opinions about whether the divisions are even or they are uneven. However, what we find that to be very important in this Vastu Purusha mandala in this particular ground plan.

There is one space which is at the centre, which is considered to be the space which is dedicated to the Lord Brahma, and Brahma is someone who is also related to the act of creation. So, if we consider that this is a ground plan for any of the garbhagriha or the sanctum sanctorum in which we can imagine the central space which is kept for Lord Brahma that is the space in which the deities will be installed.

And so at the centre of this Vastu Purusha mandala which is also a metaphor creation is the space where the deity figures are installed and worshipped by the devotees. And this also gives us a sense of how this square ground plan for the garbhagriha is something that is uniformly seen almost everywhere in the Hindu temples. Of course, I am excluding the contemporary Hindu temples.

But mostly the ones which have followed the architectural treaties from the very early period, we find this particular ground plan had been implemented in most of these temples. We will be continuing on the vertical elevation of the structure in the next lecture. Thank you.