UNIT 3 SCULPTURE

3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous units you have studied about painting. Similarly we find different styles in sculpture. In this unit we discuss the techniques and materials used in creating sculpture. We will study the salient features of sculptures in different periods. We will also study the principles and techniques that were followed to create them.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit you will be able to:
- understand the evolution and development of Indian sculpture;
- discuss the iconography and techniques;
- know the history of Indian sculpture; and
- know about the trends and approaches in sculpture.

3.2 EARLY STAGES

You might have visited a temple or a chaitya, where you might have seen some sculptures. You were able to understand some of them but not everything. The sculptural art in India developed with a divine background. Let us try to know the significant features and the development of sculpture in India.

Indian sculpture is the product of Indian culture. The sculptural tradition emerges from folk level in villages. The potter’s wheel is the first instrument which turned the clay and created different shapes of pots and dishes. In the beginning images were created in clay on a small scale. Later it progressed into the terracotta art. The images were made out of fine clay and then baked in the kiln so that the images did not melt when it came into contact with water. We will learn more about terracotta art in the next unit on Indus valley. Sculpture as an art form progressed into many styles during the historical period. We get to see many sculptures of gods and goddesses created in sculpture, metal,
wood and ivory for the purpose of worship. The sculptures were also created to decorate the different parts of the Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu architecture.

### 3.3 BASIC ELEMENTS

There have been two streams of sculpture traditions:

1. Folk level in villages, which is natural and functional, which is also known as Lower Tradition or Little Tradition. Sculptures produced at this level are for different seasons, festivals or ancestral worship.

2. Classical level based on the principles and texts, which is also known as Higher Tradition. The sculptors have to follow certain texts to create the sculptures.

These two traditions are not exclusive to each other. The roots of Higher Tradition are in the Lower Tradition. For example the worship of snake or tree is basically part of village beliefs. But the Higher Tradition picked up the practice from such beliefs and added their value system based on texts and literature. These later became major religious symbols with their own meanings in Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu traditions.

### 3.4 BASIC TECHNIQUES

The techniques discussed below are basically used for stone carving. Minute carvings and inlay work (fixing the required piece by carving the spot) are used in wood and ivory carvings. The techniques used for metal sculpture are entirely different.

**a) Engraving:** The figures were carved on rocks in the beginning. Such line carving on the surface of the rock is known as engraving. Good examples are the engravings in the rock art phase.

**b) Low relief:** Compared to engraving the low relief sculptures are deeply carved. The images and motifs appear as the embossed ones. The stories of the epics (Hindu) and jataka (Buddhist) stories were created in low-relief technique. Examples are the narrative panels from Buddhist chaityas such as Sanchi and Barhut.

**c) Middle relief:** The middle relief sculptures are more deeply carved than the low-relief sculptures. These sculptures create the illusion of movement. Such high relief are seen on the walls of many temples.

**d) High-relief:** The figures emerge out of the wall but the rear portion of the figure cannot be seen. The sculptures found in the rock-cut architecture are examples of high relief.

**e) Images in-the-round:** The sculptures that are seen all round belong to this category. An entire stone is carved in the form of an image for the purpose of worship or to place in the required positions of the temple units. An example is the images worshipped in the garbhagriha of the temple.

**f) Stencil style:** Carvings on temples has one more style, called ‘stencil style’. In this technique the entire surface remains plain but the cutting of figures and designs is done deep into stone. The carvings on the shikhara (the tower) of the Hindu temples are done in this style. Later we find abundant use of this technique in Islamic art.

**Metal sculptures:** They are popularly identified as bronzes. This is an important branch of Indian sculpture. The art of metal casting always received great attention and is of the
The metal sculptures are found even in the Indus valley period dated around 3000 BC.

There are two basic techniques in metal casting –

1. **Lost-wax method**: Metal images were cast by the *cire perdue* or lost-wax process. The steps to be followed in this method are:
   
i) The image is conceived and modelled first using only wax.
   
ii) This model is coated with layers of fine clay. Now wax cannot be seen and the model looks like a clay image with an opening at the top and bottom.
   
iii) The liquid metal is poured into this hole and the wax melts and flows out through the other hole. Thus the wax is lost and the hot metal liquid flows into the clay image.
   
iv) It should be allowed to cool down.
   
v) Then the clay covering is to be broke open. The metal image is seen. The sculptors give final touches by chiselling unnecessary parts, carving the decorations and polishing the image. The sculpture of the dancing girl from Indus valley is the earliest example of metal sculpture in India. Large numbers of metal sculptures are found in the archaeological excavations of all historical periods. But the finest examples are the Nataraja sculptures from the Chola period.

2. **Hollow-wax method**: The other method followed was to create a model in clay with all the details and then pour the liquid metal thinly all over the model. After cooling the clay part is removed and the mould would be hollow. Such sculptures come from many folk traditions.

### 3.5 ANCIENT TEXTS ON INDIAN SCULPTURE

The word for sculpture is *shilpa* which means to ‘create’. Several texts were written which can be brought under the category of *shilpa* texts. The development of Hindu temple architecture is closely associated with the rituals. There are many texts known as ‘agamas’, which are like manuals for performing rituals in the system of worship. There are separate texts for Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina sculptures. In Hinduism itself there are texts on *Shaiva* (on Shiva), *Vaishnava* (on Vishnu), *Shakta* (on Shakti goddess) and other deities. These texts give the details of iconography: the seating, standing postures, hand postures, the dress they should wear, the attributes they hold in hands, the type of head dress, jewellery they have to wear, the vehicles they use and such other things.

### 3.6 SUMMARY

In this unit we have discussed Indian sculptural heritage. We have tried to understand the basic elements that are to be known while considering Indian sculptures, the various techniques of chiselling stone sculptures and the way the metal sculptures were produced. With the techniques known to our people they have produced great artistic bronze sculptures from very early times. We have also realised that the Indian sculptors created the sculptures not merely by trial and error methods but by following the rules and measurements laid down by the *shilpa* texts. They created perfect images with artistic merits in stone, metal and wood.
3.7 SELFASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Self Assessment Questions 1
Which of the following are correct:

a) The sculptural tradition emerges from folk level in villages.
b) The sculptural art in India developed with a divine background.
c) We do not get to see much terracotta art in the Indus valley.
d) In the beginning images were created in clay in a small way.
e) Sculpture as an art form did not made progress during the historical period.

Self Assessment Questions 2
Fill in the blanks with the list given below:

i) Higher Tradition, ii) stencil style, iii) Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu architecture, iv) bronzes, v) Shaiva (on Shiva), Vaishnava (on Vishnu), Shakti (on Shakti goddess)

a) In Hinduism itself there are texts on———,———,———, and other deities.
b) The carvings on the shikharas of the Hindu temples are done in———
c) Classical level based on the principles and texts, is also known as———
d) The sculptures were created to decorate the different parts of———
e) Metal sculptures are popularly identified as———

Self Assessment Questions 3
Make a list of different techniques in the Indian sculptural tradition.

3.8 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. Which are the basic elements of Indian sculptures?
2. Write a note on the stages of ‘lost-wax’ method of sculpture.
3. What were the early types in Indian sculpture?

3.9 ANSWERS

Self Assessment Questions 1
The correct ones are – a), b) and d)

Self Assessment Questions 2
a) v, b) ii, c) i, d) iii, e) iv

Self Assessment Questions 3
Terminal Questions

1. The basic elements of Indian sculptures are found in two levels.

Folk level in villages, which is natural and functional is also known as Lower Tradition or Little Tradition. Sculptures produced at this level are for different seasons, festivals or ancestral worship. The classical level is based on the principles and texts, which is also known as Higher Tradition. The sculptors follow certain texts to create the sculptures.

These two traditions are not exclusive to each other. The roots of the Higher Tradition are in the Lower Tradition. For example the worship of snake or tree is basically part of village beliefs. But the Higher Tradition picked up the practice from such beliefs and added to their value system based on texts and literature. These became major religious symbols with their own meanings in Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu traditions.

2. Stages in the ‘Lost Wax’ method - Metal images were cast by the cire perdue or lost-wax process. The steps to be followed in this method:

i) The image is conceived and modelled first using only wax.

ii) This model is coated with layers of fine clay. Now wax can not be seen and the model looks like a clay image with an opening at the top and bottom.

iii) The liquid metal is poured into this hole and the wax melts and flows out through the other hole. Thus the wax is lost and the hot metal liquid flows into the clay image.

iv) It should be allowed to cool down.

v) Then the clay covering is to be break open. The metal image is seen. The sculptors give final touches by chiselling out unnecessary parts, carving the decorations and polishing the image.

3. Indian sculpture is the product of Indian culture. The sculptural tradition emerges from folk level in villages. The potter’s wheel is the first instrument which turned the clay and created different shapes of pots and dishes. In the beginning images were created in clay in a small way. Later it progressed into the terracotta art. The images were made out of fine clay and then baked in the kiln so that the images did not melt when it came in contact with water. Sculpture as an art form progressed into many styles during the historical period. We get to see many sculptures of gods and goddesses created in sculpture, metal, wood and ivory for the purpose of worship. The sculptures were also created to decorate the different parts of the Buddhist, Jaina and Hindu architecture.