

Birth and Spread of New Philosophies in Asia, part 1

Aryan Migrations/Vedic Period, about 1500-322 BCE

Caucasian/Indo-Aryan peoples

Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas

Mahabharata, Ramayana

caste system – priests, warriors, merchants, laborers

Indian Art: Key Ideas

- Art is functional: used in religious practice for worship and devotion to the gods
- Three great religions have origins in literary and philosophical texts of this period (derived from oral traditions): Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism
- Material world (*maya*) is an illusion; we must understand the nature of the divine in order to escape an endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth (*samsara*)
- Visualization of the god is central to our understanding
- Evocation of the senses plays a role in our experience of the world as a gift of the gods

terms/names/places

Brahman – undifferentiated existence (everything in the universe)

Enlightenment (eternal bliss):

moksha – Hindu

nirvana – Buddhist

kaivala – Jain

Buddhism: Origins and Ideas

- Prince Siddhartha Gautama renounced his earthly life of luxury, meditated on how to alleviate suffering in the world, achieved enlightenment, and became “the Buddha.”
- The Buddha’s teachings were written down by his followers in the *sutras*.
- Buddha images are used to contemplate the divine/ the “Buddha nature” so that we can become like him (they are both teaching and sacred images).
- Buddhists seek *nirvana*, or release from an endless cycle of birth/death/rebirth.

Afghanistan (Gandhara), *Standing Buddha*, 3rd century, schist, 2000.153

Pakistan (Gandhara), *Head of Buddha*, 2nd-3rd century, grey schist, 57.44 (nov)

Thailand (Siam), *Seated Buddha*, 10th century, bronze, 69.86.2

terms/names/places

Gandhara

Chandragupta Maurya

Ashoka

axis mundi – axis of the world

dharma – doctrine of ethics/duties

stupa

Sanchi

jatakas – tales of the Buddha’s previous lives

circumambulation

mandala – circular diagram of Buddhist cosmos

Maurya period (322-185 BCE)

Shunga period (185-72 BCE)

Early Andhra period (70 BCE-1st c. CE)

Kushan period (30-320 CE)

Later Andhra period (1st c.-320 CE)

Gupta period: North India (320-500 CE)

yakshis/yakshas – nature spirits
Chaitya (“sacred”) halls
Hinayana/Theravada – “lesser vehicle” Buddhism
Mahayana – “greater vehicle” Buddhism
bodhisattvas
Shakyamuni Buddha (563-483 BCE) – founder
urna – “third eye”
ushnisha – cranial protrusion
mudras – hand gestures
Mathura style
Amaravati style
Sarnath style

Jainism: Origins and Ideas

- Mahavira gave up his earthly possessions and practiced severe austerities as an ascetic to attain enlightenment.
- Images of Mahavira are a symbol of perfection pointing toward a spiritual goal.
- Through a life of ascetism, Jain monks attain *kaivala*, which is release from an endless cycle of birth/death/rebirth.
- *Tirthankaras* (“pathfinders”) help others find the path to enlightenment; also called *Jinas* (“victors”).

India, Gujrat region, *Mahavira Gives Away all His Possessions*, about 1500, opaque watercolors and gold on paper, 90.29.4 (nov)

India, *Seated Jina*, 1108, burnished black stone, 98.211

India, *Standing Jina*, 11th or 12th century, bronze, 98.246

India, Rajasthan, *Cosmic Parsvanatha*, 16th century, colors on cotton, 97.77 (nov)

terms/names/places

Kalpasutra/Book of Ritual

asana – place and position of yoga practitioner

shrivatsa – “jewel”; chakra location; point of physical or spiritual purity and energy

maya – physical world of illusion

prana – yogic breath control

Digambara – “sky clad” sect

Parsvanatha

Hinduism: Origins and Ideas

- Emerges out of mingled Vedic culture and indigenous beliefs; deities are associated with forces of nature
- Social class/caste system sanctioned by Hinduism
- First images appear in 2nd c. BCE; by 6th c. CE imagery is well established
- Each sect considers its deity to be supreme
- *Brahmins* (priests) perform rituals of the faith to help release practitioners from *samsara* and achieve *moksha*
- Artists create rich imagery based on Hindu/Vedic literature

Characteristics of Hindu Art

- Profusely **ornamental, textural, and colorful**, Hindu art reflects the abundance and favor of the gods: through repetition and reduplication of elements we reach understanding and assimilation of the ideas expressed.
- **Symbolism** is pervasive. Many of the forms and iconography used were prescribed by ancient religious texts, as were the ritual practices in which the images are used.
- The arts show us a world infused with **divine dynamism**: forms are tactile, sensuous, and radiant. This is the way artists make manifest the divine nature.

India, Madhya Pradesh, *Kubera*, 8th century, red sandstone, 2015.12

India, Madhya Pradesh, *Shiva's Family (Uma-Mahaeshvara)*, about 1000, buff sandstone, 97.36

India, Tamil Nadu, *Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)*, about 1100, bronze, 29.2

India, Tamil Nadu, *Yogini holding a jar*, early 10th century, granite, 60.21

India, Tamil Nadu, *Devi Uma Parameshvari (Parvati)*, 14th century, bronze, 2009.12.1

West Bengal or Bangladesh, *Vishnu with Lakshmi and Sarasvati*, 11th century, grey schist, 90.67

India, Rajasthan, *Lintel with Vishnu and celestial musicians*, 12th century, grey limestone, 96.54.2

terms/names/places

Brahman – undifferentiated existence

Brahma – creator god

brahmin – priest

Shiva/Shivaism

Vishnu/Vaishnavism

Shakti/Shaktism, Devi

Nandi/Nandin – bull, Shiva's vehicle

Mithunas – loving couples

Ganesh/Ganesha – elephant-headed remover of obstacles

Karttikeya/Skanda – god of war and wisdom, protector of children

Nataraja – Lord of the Dance

Ganga – goddess of river Ganges

Devi, Uma, Parvati, Durga

bhakti – complete surrender and devotion

Lakshmi – Vishnu's wife/consort, goddess of wealth and good fortune

Sarasvati – Vishnu's wife/consort, goddess of learning and wisdom

Garuda – Vishnu's vehicle, half man/half bird

Varanasi/Benares – pilgrimage site on the Ganges

puja – worship (through offerings)

darshan – face-to-face contact with the god

prasad – part of offering returned to you that has been blessed by the god

Pallava period: South India (500-750 CE)

Chandella period: North India (950-1300)

Chola dynasty: South India (846-1173)

Pala/Sena period: NE India (730-1200)