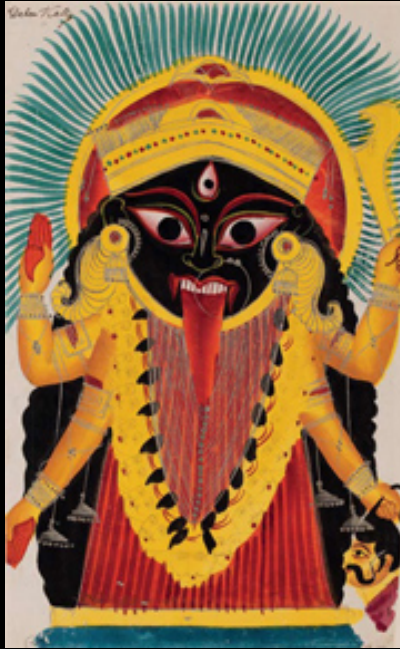


# HINDU



## Sacred Images

p. 17-36 Hindu Art

## REVIEW— from last week

EARLY Indus Valley civilizations--  
Harappa and Mohenjo Daro.  
Images were mostly animals and  
female figure. Both were connected to  
the early indigenous beliefs.

Then, the Aryans brought the Vedas,  
stories of their gods.  
We also learned that the stories of  
Hinduism came from the Vedic Texts.  
In the course of the first Millennium  
BCE the **Vedas** were succeeded by the  
Upanishads and **Brahmans**.

Even at that point there is no mention  
of Vishnu, Shiva or Shakti... only  
Bramah.



Proto-Hindu mother goddesses, Mohenjo Daro, 3000 BCE



*Bull seal, from Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE.*

## REVIEW– from last week

The next significant Sanskrit texts are the Ramayana or Mahabharata (including Bhagavad Gita) and epics...composed in about the 4<sup>th</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries BCE. (400-300BCE)

Poetic narratives assume the existence of divine figures who manifest themselves to their human worshippers.

**The complex myths of the Bhagavad Gita, Mahabharata (mah-bra-ata) and Ramayana were of crucial importance in shaping the personalities and aspects of the Hindu deities.**

But it wasn't until the first or second century CE when these legends shifted to the personalities of Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti.

Though they were mentioned in the Vedic texts much earlier

***Dating:*** most of you probably know this but since we are talking about the time before the common era (BCE) and the common era (CE), it might be helpful to mention these used to be identified as BC and AD. Because these designations referred to Jesus Christ, and most of the people in the world are not Christian, it was changed to be more neutral.

## CHRONOLOGY

2500-1600 BCE	Peak of Indus Valley civilization
1500-800 BCE	Composition of the Vedic hymns
800-200 BCE	Composition of the major Upanishads
563-483 BCE	Life of the Buddha
540-468 BCE	Life of Mahavira, founder of Jainism
500 BCE-500 CE	Compilation of the Mahabharata, including the Bagavad Gita.
1785	Bagavad Gita first translated into English

*Dating Indian texts has been very difficult for scholars, partly because many of them were compiled over long periods of time. So, these dates are general.*

*Understanding the dates is important as the stories relate directly to the images.*

## HINDU SACRED IMAGES

Though there is a wide array of images in Hindu art there is a consistency in the representation of the various personalities.

This is because of the **canons** that guided sculptors and painters.

**Image-making manuals** guided artisans on how to work by defined rules.

**It was only by working according to these strict rules could the deity be persuaded to inhabit the image.**

It is not uncommon to have image-making manuals, or canons that guide artists in the making of images, especially those of a deity.

Egypt had them . **Greece and Rome had them.** Christianity had them.

The reason was to be sure worshipers could clearly identify the Deity from ordinary people.

## MAIN HINDU DIETIES

Brama--the god responsible for creation.

Vishnu maintains the universe. His avatars enumerate the occasions when the god comes to earth to save mankind.

Shiva is lord of destruction and transformation.

Shakti' s appearances range from goddesses of annihilation and death to those who guarantee peace and prosperity.

## THE CONCEPT OF MULTIPLICITY

A fundamental principle of Hindu theology is the concept of multiplicity.

The major deities are worshipped in a large variety of forms that reflect their powers and natures.

## BRAMA

Brama--the god responsible for creation  
-essence of all beings past, present,  
future.

-sustains and governs the universe  
of annihilation and death to those who  
guarantee peace and prosperity.

He has 4 heads, 4 faces, 4 arms

Unlike other gods, he has no weapons but  
holds symbols of knowledge and creation:

1. ladle—to feed the sacrificial fire
2. A vessel for water—where all creation comes
3. Prayer beads
4. A scroll— the Vedas

Often sitting on a lotus (symbol of nature  
and living essence)

Wears a crown and his mount is a swan.



Brama seated on a lotus throne.

Brahma is usually depicted with four heads ---  
the number of the four cardinal directions,  
and four arms which refer to the four Vedas  
and the four aims of the householder's life:  
duty, success, refinement and liberation.



# BRAMA

Here are some other images of Brama.



This one is at the Met.



Here he is with the goddess Saraswati





## VISHNU

Vishnu is -the god responsible for maintaining creation  
-he contains the essence of all beings past, present, future.  
-he sustains and governs the universe.

Usually depicted Blue color

With four arms.

In each hand he holds:

1. Lotus Flower.
2. Mace (used in warfare).
3. Conch and
4. Discus weapon

The *Bhagavad Gita* describes Vishnu as the all-pervading essence of all beings, the master of—and beyond—the past, present and future, the creator and destroyer of all existences, one who supports, preserves, sustains and governs the universe and originates and develops all elements within.



*Vishnu Anantasayana Panel, From the Dashavatara Temple, 6<sup>th</sup> century*

*Note: the snake protecting Vishnu on the ocean.*

Temple dedicated to Vishnu in India.

## VISHNU

Vishnu can be worshiped as himself as he reclines and rests on the king of the serpent deities.

Here he Narayana who reclines on the serpent Ananta (Infinity) afloat the casual waters. As he dreams, a lotus arises from his navel, bearing Brahma the personification of the creative principle inherent in Consciousness.

This sculptural relief depicts a popular creation myth featuring Vishnu as Narayana who reclines on the serpent Ananta (Infinity) afloat the casual waters. As Narayana dreams, a lotus arises from his navel, bearing Brahma the personification of the creative principle inherent in Consciousness.

This is the creation myth that one of your videos was about.



You have seen this sculptural relief before but here it is with some of the architecture around it. It's carved into the side of a temple so when people come to the temple to worship, they can engage with Vishnu.

*Vishnu Anantasayana Panel, From the Dashavatara Temple, 6<sup>th</sup> century*

Temple dedicated to Vishnu in India.



## VISHNU

As himself, in this image Vishnu descends to earth on the back of Garuda (mythical bird creature that appears in both Buddhist and Hindu mythology. Sometimes shown as an eagle) to deliver Gajendra, and elephant devotee of the god who had been trapped in a lotus pond. Snake king and queen have captured him.

However, Vishnu has 10 avatars or worldly appearances, which are animal, human or a combination of both.

He is one the heroes: **Krisna**, **Rama** and **Parashurama**, **Nara-Simha** or **Narasimba** (the man-lion)-- **Vamana** (the dwarf)-- **Matsya** (the fish)--**Kurma** (the tortoise)--**Varaha** (the boar) and finally he will be **Kalki**, who will appear when the world ends, riding a white horse and heralding the start of a new golden age.



Here Vishnu is riding on Garuda to save Gajendra (the elephant devotee) who was trapped in a lotus pond.  
Dashavatara temple, Madhya Pradesh

# VISHNU

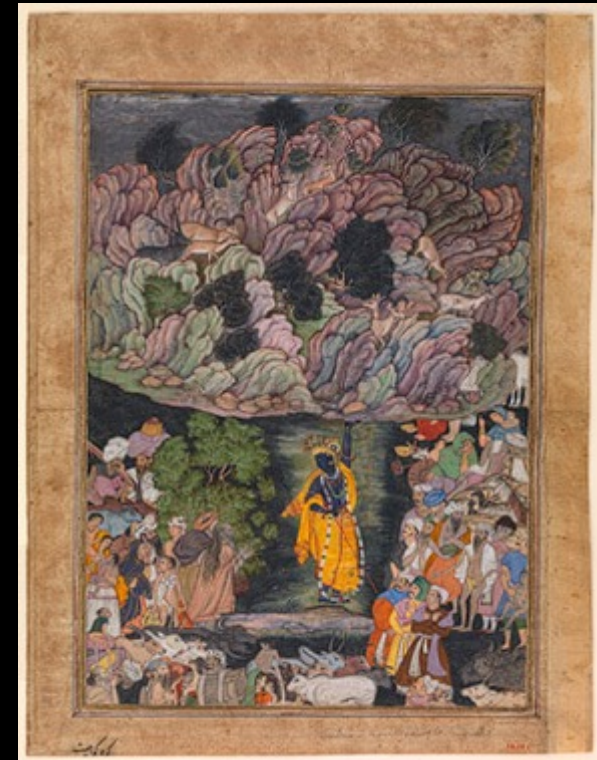
Some of his most common avatars are:  
Narasimha (the man-lion), Rama and  
Krishna.



Here Vishnu assumes the form of the hero Krishna as he battles the horse demon, Keshi in a popular Krishna story.  
This sculpture is at the MET.



This is a bronze statue of Vishnu in his man-lion incarnation as Yoga-Narasimha.  
It's from India 1250 CE



In this painting, Krishna is shown holding up a mountain to protect the people of Braj from the storm god.  
This is also at the MET.



## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

Hindu art is enriched by the sculpted and painted illustrations of mythological events. Some are based on *Sanskrit* compilations of Hindu legends, such as *Puranas*, others are stories pertaining to certain shrines.

The narrative descriptions usually focus on a single event.

Such as Vishnu stepping out of the cosmic ocean to nuzzle the goddess Bhudevi with his boar head.

In this story Vishnu as Varaha, comes to earth to save Bhudevi, the earth goddess (a personification of the Earth) from the demon Hiranyaksha who had her trapped in the primordial ocean.



Vishnu as Varahara, carving in the cave temple at Udayagiri in Madhya Pradesh, 5<sup>th</sup> century. While the story is one from Hindu Mythology, it is also read as a political allegory of the Gupta Kings.

Page 46-47 book.

## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

We also see certain moments of intervention by gods as in this image of Vishnu riding through the air on Garuda to free Gajendra, an elephant devotee trapped in a lotus pond.

Deities triumphing over their adversaries proliferate in Hindu art.



Dashavatara temple, Madhya Pradesh

Left: One of the most frequently depicted combats is the war between Rama and Ravana (the multi-headed demon king of Lanka, a story from the Ramayana.)

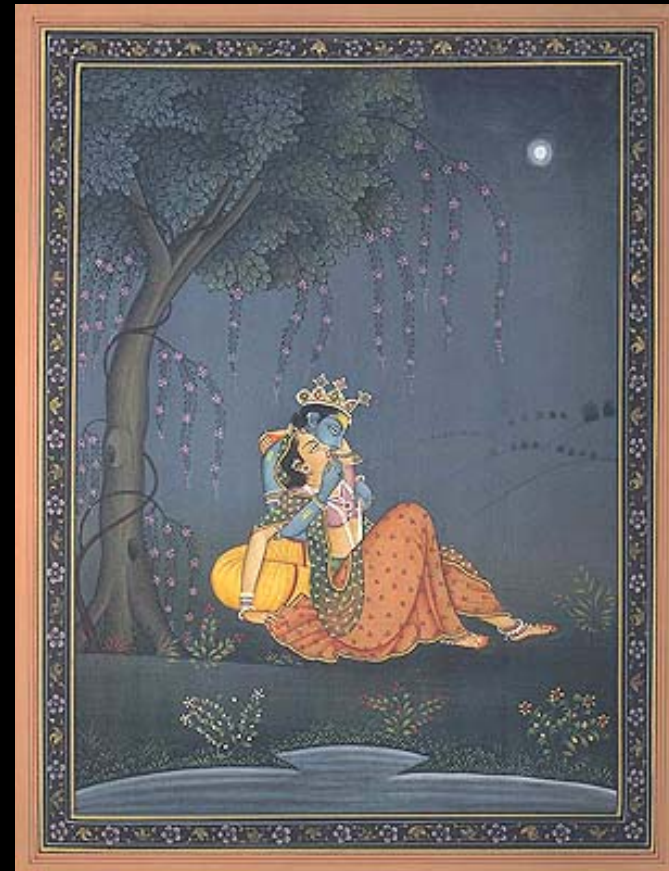


## VISHNU as RAMA

As we discussed last week, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, Hinduism emerged again in India after several hundred years of Islam.

With this emergence comes regional interests. In northern India, in particular, they concentrated on the worship of Krishna and Rama and the traditions of the Ramayan epic.

*The Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* were important epic stories that assume the existence of divine figures who manifest themselves to their human worshipers in a variety of ways.



Lord Rama, considered by many Hindus to be based on an historical figure, is perhaps the most virtuous hero from Hindu **mythology** and he, along with his wife Sita, are a picture of purity and marital devotion. Further, the adventures of Rama illustrate above all the importance and rewards of fulfilling one's pious duty or *dharma*.

Rama and Sita in the moonlight.

## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

The Ramayana tells the details of the life of Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu.

Born as the eldest son of Kausalya and Dasharatha, king of Ayodhya, Rama is referred to within Hinduism as *Maryada Purushottama*, literally *the Perfect Man* or *Lord of Self-Control* or *Lord of Virtue*.

Rama is the husband of Sita, whom Hindus consider to be an avatar of Lakshmi and the embodiment of perfect womanhood.

There are many stories of Rama and Sita.



Ravana kidnapping Sita. 9<sup>th</sup> century.

## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

The Ramayana is not just a poem to tell the life of Rama, it also depicts the duties of relationship portraying 'ideal' characters like:

The ideal father

The ideal servant

The ideal brother

The ideal wife

and finally

The ideal King

In this story Rama is exiled from his kingdom because he is heir to the throne. In Exile, he visited many sages but also angered a god who captured Sita. The commander of the monkey army helps get her back.



Rama, Sita and Rama's brother, Lakshmana exiled in the forest.



## VISHNU AS KRISHNA

The Krishna Legend is the other main source for stories and imagery.

**Krishna, another incarnation of Lord Vishnu**, appears as many different characters in the *Purana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ragamalas* among other stories and songs.

Krishna means, blue-black, and we can identify him in painting because of his skin color.

In the same way that the Rama stories present 'ideal' ways to live, the Gitas too, functions as a practical, self-contained guide to life.



**Krishna as Cowherd 1860**  
India, Delhi-Agra area  
guache on paper

## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

The Bagavad Gita-- Here, in a conversation between Krishna and Arjuna taking place on the battlefield before the start of the Kurukshetra war Krishna .

Responding to Arjuna's confusion and moral dilemma about fighting his own cousins who had taken the side of evil,.

Krishna explains to Arjuna his duties as a warrior and prince and elaborates on different Yogic and Vedantic philosophies, with examples and analogies.



*Arjuna slays Karana*



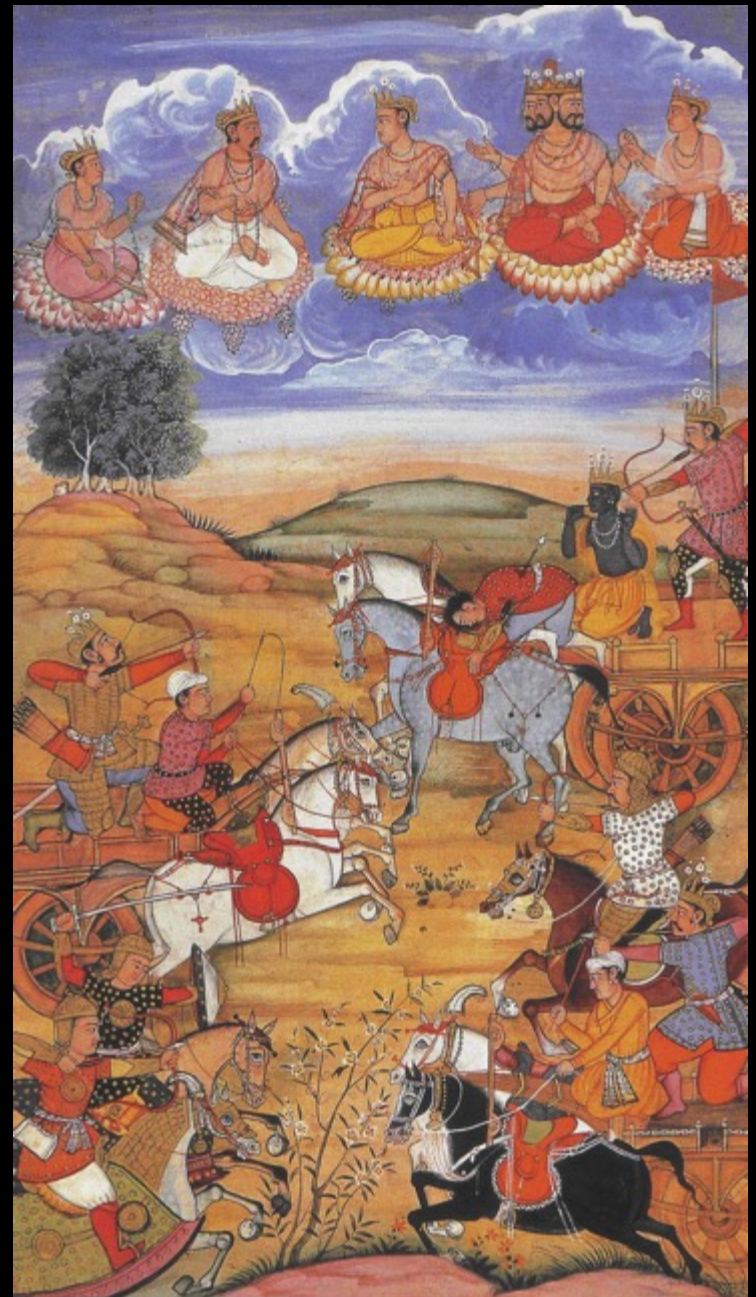
## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

The Bagavad Gita-- is a small excerpt of the Mahabharata, the larger of the two Indian epics, the other being the Ramayana. Both present discussion of various ritual, cosmological and religio-philosophical matters.

The Bhagavad Gita takes place at a critical point in the Mahabharata when two vast armies stand close to battle.

Arjuna, the most distinguished warrior of one army tells Krishna, his charioteer and friend, he doesn't want to fight because it is his cousin who leads the other army.

Krishna then inspires Arjuna to fight as it is his duty to behave according to tradition in all areas of life, including war.



*Arjuna slays Karana*



## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

Events drawing from the Ramayana and the Krishna legend are often combined, represented in linear fashion along a frieze on a temple or in miniature painting, spread out over several pages.

A popular story from the Ramayana is that of the abduction of Sita where Rama gets help from Hanuman, the Monkey God.



Frieze with story from the Ramayana and The Monkey God, Hanuman, India, 9th Century



## HINDU ART—NARRATIVE TRADITIONS

These stories are alive and well as we can see in current theater and ritual.

These pictures represent actors and dancers enacting the stories today.



Actors and dancers performing stories from the Ramayana.



## LAKSHMI—VISHNU'S WIFE

Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune and prosperity (material and spiritual) is the wife and Shakti (energy) of Vishnu.

The worship of Lakshmi, predates that of Vishnu.

Images of her have been found in the Indus Valley area as far back as 1,000 BCE

She is also worshiped as a Jain Goddess and in certain Buddhist sects.

Lakshmi is usually depicted in Indian art as an elegantly dressed, prosperity-showering golden-colored woman with owl as her vehicle, signifying the importance of economic activity in maintenance of life, her ability to move, work and prevail in confusing darkness.



In this image we see red powder in the background that has been added by worshipers as an offering.

Red powder is thrown on statues during prayers. Red is the color for Lakshmi (or Shakti).

Shravanabelagola Temple, Karnataka

*See page 39 for another image of Lakshmi.*

## LAKSHMI—VISHNU'S WIFE

She typically stands or sits like a yogin on a lotus pedestal and holds lotus in her hand, a symbolism for fortune, self-knowledge and spiritual liberation.

Her iconography shows her with four hands, which represent the four goals of human life considered important to the Hindu way of life: dharma (teachings or knowledge), kama (love or pleasure), artha (wealth) and moksha (enlightenment or escape from cycles of rebirth).

Similarly to other gods, Lakshmi appears in different forms.

Sometimes she is shown with elephants, representing wisdom. When they are pouring water on the goddess, it represents that the Dharma, kama, artha and moksha must be continuously strengthened as the pouring water.



This image of Lakshmi is from the North Gate of the great Stupa at Sanchi, a Buddhist monument 1<sup>st</sup> Century.

We will talk about this Stupa next week.



Vishnu and Lakshmi on the side of a temple.

## SHIVA—THE DESTROYER

Shiva is worshiped as the destroyer and transformer. He has many manifestations in art. He is depicted as:

- a Lingam— phallic form
- A yogi
- A man with his wife, Parvati, and sons Ganesha and Kartikeya
- The Cosmic Dancer— Nataraja
- Slaying Demons
- Ardhanarishvara, Shiva and Devi (male and female)

*Shiva—(from the Sanskrit “Auspicious One”) is worshiped as the destroyer & has many incarnations (or avatars).*



Shiva dancing as Nataraja—The Cosmic Dancer.





Shiva as the Linga—this is a common form of representation of Shiva. He is shown as a phallus shape, sometimes with his face and sometimes without.  
See page 41 and 53 in book.



Above: Shiva as Sadashiva—note his attributes

Left: Ardhanarishvara—Shiva as male/female  
Sometimes Shiva is shown as half male and half female.



## SHIVA—in his forms

*This contemporary painting shows Shiva with many of his attributes. In the background we see Nandi, his bull mount.*

*Then, he is shown with his long flowing hair, as discussed in the Creation story you heard. He also has the linga at his feet, another way he is represented based on a story.*

*He has a crescent moon, blue skin, snake around his neck, all attributes connected to different stories.*



One of the most popular representations of Shiva is as, Nataraja, the Cosmic Dancer, within a circle of fire which represents the never-ending cycle of time. He holds the divine fire (Agni) which destroys the universe and the drum, which makes the first sounds of the creation. One hand makes the calming gesture and another points to his left foot, symbol of salvation. He also stamps one foot on the dwarf figure Apasmara Purusha who represents illusion and who leads men away from truth.

## SHIVA—AS THE MALE/FEMALE

In this form—Ardhanarishvara— Shiva is represented as both god, Shiva, and his female consort, Parvati (or Devi, Shakti and Uma).

As Ardhanarishvara he is both male and female, representing the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe.

It also signifies how the Shakti, or female energy is inseparable from the male.



Shiva as Ardhanarishvara with Nandi, on the Gangikonde Cholapuram temple.

## HINDU ART—MAGICAL PROTECTION

The protective purpose of the temple sculpture and painting is taken literally. The images serve a crucial role in the magical protection of religious monuments.

Temples require shielding from negative forces so they have guardian figures, placed on doorways who are armed and have fierce expressions...often bearing the same emblems as the god or goddess they are defending.

Human warriors also appear providing insight into the military life of the time (with elephants, infantry, cavalry, musicians, war-chariots).



These are the Ganas. They show up in the sculpture that is carved into Hindu architecture.



## HINDU ART—HEAVENLY FEMALE IMAGES

Heavenly beauties, or *surasundaris*, appear as young women with generous hips, small waists and full breasts. They are shown in alluring sexual poses that express the guises of female sexuality.

Surasundaris accompany the Yamuna and Ganga, as personifications of sacred rivers, and as protectors. Next week we will see the sources of these images, the yakshi.

*They also play musical instruments, showing the importance of music in ritual worship.*



Dancer from  
Chennakeshava temple,  
Hoysala period, 1117

## HINDU ART—UNION OF MALE AND FEMALE

Males and females often appear together, standing, embracing or engaged in sexual acts.

They are called, *mithunas*, and rather than pornographic, these are interpreted as another form of protection for the temple.



Sculptures on temple wall, Vishvanatha Temple, Khajuraho, India, ca. 1000.



## HINDU ART—UNION OF MALE AND FEMALE

In Hindu belief, the magical efficacy of sex to protect a sacred monument relates back to earlier fertility beliefs.



Sculptures on temple wall, Kandariya temple  
p. 90, 91, 92



## HINDU ART—ANIMALS

We've already discuss this but animals and flowers are ever present, attesting to the beneficial power of nature. Animals provide symbolic support and are often sculpted in columns or plinths, bearing the load of the building.

Fantastic beasts and monsters are depicted with animals such as horses and bulls.

Cobras (nagas), are favored for their magical powers connected to the underworld, are often seen.



Nandi (sacred bull of Shiva), representing nature and agriculture



## REVIEW

The lecture this week expanded on the one from the week before.

We focused on the types of images and the stories that inform them.

We looked at the main Hindu Deities and some of their avatars and attributes.

Many of the Hindu sculptures we look at are carved into or are part of a temple dedicated to one of the gods.

While the scriptures of Hinduism are dated before 1000 BCE, we have no remains of temples before the 5<sup>th</sup> century. There may have been temples but they didn't survive.



Vishvanatha Temple, Khajuraho, India, ca. 1000.

## NEXT CLASS

Next week we shift back to Buddhism with the beginnings of Buddhism and Buddhist art– and history. Some similarities exist in both Buddhist and Hindu images as both emerged from the same source.



The Yakshi, female earth spirits and symbols of fertility predate both beliefs.



These two columns, one associated with Vishnu, the other Buddhism, were both dedicated to Hindu and Buddhist beliefs but without human images.