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"The man who knows nothing of music, literature, or art is no better than a beast," ancient Hindu wisdom warned, "only without a beast's tail or teeth." The arts of Civilization's armor, her weapons and shield against all the pitfalls of life, lighting the darkest corner of the trail, helping us to cross its most dangerous passes. Indian wisdom has always extolled art as a key to the salvation of ultimate release sought by all good Hindus. There is a holistic quality about Indian art, a unity of many forms and artistic experiences. Like the microcosmic universe of a Hindu temple, they help us to climb from terrestrial trails and samsaric fears.

Art pervades every facet of Indian life, is found on every byway of Indian Civilization. Indian art in its purest form is Yoga, a disciplined style of worship and self-restraint that may also be thought of as India's oldest indigenous "science." Shiva, the "Great God" of yogic practice, visually represented as "King of Dance" (Nataraja), is the most remarkable single symbol of divine powers ever created by Indian artistic genius. Indian artists have celebrated and immortalized the beauty of human bodies in bronze and stone for more than 5,000 years. We do not know the name of a single genius among the many who brought gods to life in the Ellora, Ajanta or Elephanta, Karli caves or those who created the Chola Natarajas as magnificent as any work by Benvenuto Cellini. The great Rodin was possibly the most sensitive and perceptive of the admirers of Indian art.

The transition from cave excavation and carving to the creation of Hindu temples is most dramatically and powerfully depicted at Ellora, where an entire mountain has literally been scooped out over several centuries by patient devoted artists and architectural geniuses, who envisioned and "extracted" Lord Shiva's Mount Kailasha temple inside that enormous rock dome. Ellora's Kailasantha cave temple remains one of the true "wonders" of the world of art and a unique monument to Hindu devotion. Captain Philip Meadows Taylor (1808-1876) author, says: "the carving on some of the pillars, and of the lintels and architraves of the doors, is quite beyond description. No chased work in silver or gold could possibly be finer. But what tools this very hard, tough stone could have done wrought and polished as it is, is not at all intelligible at the present day."

Indian art is so intimately associated with Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideals that governed the Indian mind. In Indian art there is always a religious urge, a looking beyond. From the exuberant carvings of the Hindu temples to the luminous wall-paintings of Ajanta, to the intriguing art of cave sites and sophisticated temple-building traditions, the Indian subcontinent offers an amazing visual feast.



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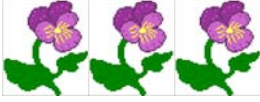
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Introduction



Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) scholar and art historian and late curator of Boston Museum, has observed: "Indian art is essentially religious. The conscious aim of Indian art is the intimation of Divinity. But the Infinite and Unconditioned cannot be expressed in finite terms; and art, unable to portray Divinity unconditioned, and unwilling to be limited by the limitation of humanity, is in India dedicated to the representation of Gods, who to finite man represent comprehensible aspects of an infinite whole. Sankaracarya prayed thus: "O Lord, pardon my three sins: I have in contemplation clothed in form Thyself that has no form; I have in praise described Thee who dost transcend all qualities; and in visiting shrines I have ignored Thine omnipresence."

(source: [Essays on National Idealism - By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy](#) Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p. 27-28).

From its Indo-Sumerian and Vedic-Mound beginnings to the various peaks reached during the Maurya, Sunga, Andhra, Kusana and Gupta periods, Indian art has been influential for centuries. **The grave and sensuous and infinitely varied arts of India have long been admired around the world.** India is vast (the size of Europe); the birthplace of great religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism; and the home of sophisticated civilizations dating back more than 4,000 years. **These factors combine to give India one of the longest and most complex art traditions of the world. Most important is the realization that "the consistent fabric of Indian life was never rent by the Western dichotomy between religious belief and worldly practice"--hence the easy coexistence in India of extreme religious asceticism and the overt eroticism that pervades temples like Khajuraho and Patan.** A grand sweep, from the ancient cities of the Indus valley, the development of Buddhist art (which by the 12th century had faded away in the land of its birth), the glorious paintings of Ajanta.

In India, anonymity of artists has not been accidental; it is a distinctive national trait. "The modern world, with its glorification of the personality of authors," observes **Ananda K. Coomaraswamy**, "produces work of genius and works of mediocrity, following the peculiarities of individual artists. In India, the virtue or defect of any work is the virtue or defect of the race in that age. The names and peculiarities of individual artists, even if we could recover them, would not enlighten us: nothing depends upon (individual) genius or requires the knowledge of an individual psychology for its interpretation. To understand it at all, we must understand experience common to all men of the time and place in which a given work was produced."

This is true of the Vedas, as well as the marvelous Kailas excavations; equally true of Mohenjadaro, about five thousand years ago. This monumental anonymity is indeed writ large on the brow of our civilization.

(source: [Our Heritage and Its Significance - By Shripad Rama Sharma](#) p. 121-122).

Sachinder Kumar Maity writes: "Like India herself Indian Art is of great antiquity and one cannot but marvel at the height reached by Indian artists during the Classical Age."

"Indian art has contributed a unique chapter in the history of human civilization", says E. B. Havell. Its continued vitality, its astonishing range - specially in the field of painting, sculpture, and architecture, no less than the lasting sense of beauty and power it conveys, has placed the artistic heritage among the major cultural legacies of the world. The architecture that created the temples of Madurai, Tanjore, Khajuraho, Orissa, the rock-cut pagodas of Mahabalipuram, the sculpture that executed the Mathura image of Buddha, Trimurti of Elephanta, the famous Nataraja of Tanjore and the paintings which had its efflorescence in the haunting world of beauty in the caves of Ajanta and Ellora, and thousand others,

have nothing to lose by comparison with the whole artistic wealth of Europe during its entire history.

(source: [Cultural Heritage of Ancient India - By Sachindra Kumar Maity](#) p.10-27).

Pitirim Sorokin (1889-1968) Russian-American sociologist of Harvard University has written:

"Art for a Hindu is life as it is interpreted by religion and philosophy. Art for art's sake is consequently unknown. Instead a symbolism was created to express various qualities of the superhuman soul and superhuman figures."

(source: [Glimpses of Indian Culture - By Dr. Giriraj Shah](#) p. 108).

Annie Wood Besant has said, "Indian Art is a blossom of the tree of the Divine wisdom, full of suggestions from worlds invisible, striving to express the ineffable, and it can never be understood merely by the emotional and the intellectual; only in the light of the Spirit can its inner significance be glimpsed."

(source: [India's Culture Through the Ages - By Mohan Lal Vidyarthi](#) p. 114).

The extant remains of Indian art cover a period of more than two thousand years. During this time many schools of thought have flourished and decayed, invaders of many races have poured into India and contributed to the infinite variety of her intellectual resources; countless dynasties have ruled and passed away. But just as through all Indian schools of thought there runs like **a golden thread the fundamental idealism of the Upanishads**, the Vedanta, so in all Indian art there is a unity that underlies all its bewildering variety.

(source: [Essays on National Idealism - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy](#) Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p. 17).

Will Durant (1885-1981) American historian has written glowingly about Hindu art:

"Before Indian art, as before every phase of Indian civilization, we stand in humble wonder at its age and its continuity. From the time of Mohenjodaro to the present, through the vicissitudes of five thousand years, India has been creating its peculiar type of beauty in a hundred arts. The record is broken and incomplete, not because India ever rested, but because war and the idol-smashing ecstasies of Moslems destroyed uncounted masterpieces of building and statuary, and poverty neglected the preservation of others. Probably no other nation known to us has ever had so exuberant a variety of arts."



"We shall never be able to do justice to Indian art, for ignorance and fanaticism have destroyed its greatest achievements, and have half ruined the rest. **At Elephanta the Portuguese certified their piety by smashing statuary and bas-reliefs in unrestrained barbarity; and almost everywhere in the north the Moslems brought to ground those triumphs of Indian architecture, of the 5th and 6th centuries,** which tradition ranks as far superior to the later works that arouse our wonder and admiration today. The Moslems decapitated statues, and tore them limb from limb; they appropriated for their mosques, and in great measure imitated, the graceful pillars of the Jain temples." Time and fanaticism joined in the destruction, for the orthodox Hindus abandoned and neglected temples that had been profaned by the touch of alien hands."

"We may guess at the lost grandeur of north Indian architecture by the powerful edifices that still survive in the south, where Moslem rule entered only in minor degree, and after some habituation to India had softened Mohammedan hatred of Hindu ways. Col. Ferguson had counted some thirty southern temples any one of which, in his estimate, must have cost as much as an English cathedral." **Only a Hindu pietist rich in words could describe the lovely symmetry of the shrine at Ittagi, in Hydrebad, or the temple at Somnathpur in Mysore, in which gigantic masses of stone are carved with the delicacy of lace;** or the Hoysaleshwara Temple at Halebid...Here, **Ferguson** adds, "the artistic combination of horizontal and vertical lines, and the play of outline and of light and shade, far surpass anything in Gothic art. The effects are just what the

medieval architects were often aiming at, but which they never attained so perfectly as was done at Halebid."

If we marvel at the laborious piety that could carve eighteen hundred feet of frieze in the Halebid temple, and could portray in them two thousand elephants each different from all the rest, what shall we say of the patience and courage that could undertake to cut a complete temple out of the solid rock? But this was a common achievement of the Hindu artisans. At Mamallapuram, on the east coast near Chennai, they carved several rathas or pagodas, of which the fairest is the Dharma-raja-ratha, or monastery for the highest discipline. At Ellora, a place of religious pilgrimage.. excavating out of the mountain rock great monolithic temples of which the supreme example is the Hindu shrine of Kailasha - named after Shiva's mythological paradise in the Himalayas. Here the tireless builder cut a hundred feet down into the stone to isolate the block - 250 by 160 feet - that was to be the temple; then they carved the walls into powerful pillars, statues and bas-reliefs; then they chiseled out of the interior, and lavished there the most amazing art: let the bold fresco of "The Lovers" serve as a specimen. Finally, their architectural passion still unspent, they carved a series of chapels and monasteries deep into the rock of three sides of the quarry.

(source: [Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage - By Will Durant](#) MJF Books.1935 p. 584-585).

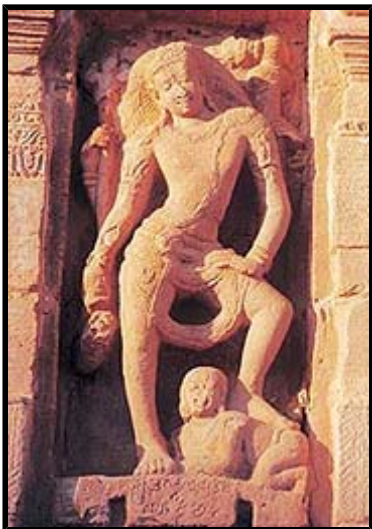
Richard Lannoy author of several books including, [The Speaking Tree: A Study of Indian Culture and Society](#) has pointed out that the caves of India are the most singular fact about Indian art, and he is right, for they serve to distinguish it from that of other civilizations. A prodigious amount of labor, spread over a period of about 1,300 years, was expended in this "art of mass", the excavations of rock sanctuaries and monasteries. These caves were hewn out of solid rock; in other words, they were "constructed" through the excavation of space. These sanctuaries were cut from nearly-perpendicular cliffs to a depth of a hundred feet: in all cases, this excavation was carried out by means of a chisel $\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide; the same chisel was also used to carve out elaborately decorated columns, galleries, and shrines. **The two largest structures of the kind are staggering in their dimensions.**

(source: [Decolonizing History: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West 1492 to the Present Day - By Claude Alvares](#) p.72-73).

Alain Danielou a.k.a **Shiv Sharan** (1907-1994), son of French aristocracy, author of numerous books on philosophy, religion, history and arts of India. He was perhaps the first European to boldly proclaim his Hinduness. He had a wide effect upon Europe's understanding of Hinduism. He explained:

"The artist must prepare a geometrical design in accordance with the symbolic proportions required for the image he wants to represent. He must concentrate his vision and his thought on the magic diagram or yantras, till he perceives through the geometrical outlines the form he is to sculpture. This concentration of the artist is one of the highest and completest form of concentration."

(source: [Glimpses of Indian Culture - By Dr. Giriraj Shah](#) p. 108).



Dr. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) Indian art historian, a remarkable critic, scholar and mystic, late curator at the Boston Museum, who dazzled the Western world with his message concerning the spiritual greatness of Indian art. A pioneer historian of Indian art and foremost interpreter of Indian culture to the West. **He detected in India "a strong national genius... since the beginning of her history."** He found Indian art and culture "a joint creation of the Dravidian and Aryan genius." Of Buddhism, he wrote: "the more profound our study, the more difficult it becomes to distinguish Buddhism from Brahmanism, or to say in what respects, if any, Buddhism is really unorthodox. The outstanding distinction lies in the fact that Buddhist doctrine is propounded by an apparently historical founder. Beyond this there are only broad distinctions of emphasis."

Indian art had accompanied Indian religion across straits and frontiers into Sri Lanka, Java, Cambodia, Siam, Burma, Tibet, Khotan, Turkestan, Mongolia, China, Korea, and Japan; "in Asia all roads lead to India." Angkor Vat a masterpiece equal to the finest architectural

achievements of the Egyptians, the Greeks, or the cathedrals of Europe. An enormous moat, twelve miles in length, surrounds the temple; over the moat runs a paved bridge guarded by dissuasive Nagas in

stone; then an ornate enclosing wall; then spacious galleries, whose relief's tell again the tales of the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**; then the stately edifice itself, rising upon a broad base, by level after level of a terraced pyramid, to the sanctuary of the god, two hundred feet high. **Here magnitude does not detract from beauty, but helps it to an imposing magnificence that startles the Western mind into some weak realization of the ancient grandeur once possessed by Oriental civilization.**

(source: [Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage By Will Durant](#) MJF Books.1935 p.601).

"The Hindus do not regard the religious, aesthetic, and scientific standpoints as necessarily conflicting, and in all their finest work, whether musical, literary, or plastic, these points of view, nowadays so sharply distinguished, are inseparably united.

(source: [The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon - By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy](#) p. 17).

"All that India can offer proceeds from her philosophy, a state of mental concentration (yoga) on the part of the artist and the enactment of a certain amount of ritual being postulated as the source of the 'spirituality' of Indian art."

(source: [The Dance of Siva: Fourteen Indian Essays - By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy](#) p. 21).

In the process of comparing both the European and Oriental traditional philosophy of art, a task, it would seem, which had convinced him of the perennial value of the traditional point of view since the works of art as in the case of the Indian sub-continent and its environs appeared to him to endure and increase in value down through the ages.

Rizwan Salim reviewer, and assistant editor, American Sentinel, has written eloquently about Hindu art:

"It is clear that India at the time when Muslim invaders turned towards it (8 to 11th century) was the earth's richest region for its wealth in precious and semi-precious stones, gold and silver; religion and culture; and its fine arts and letters. Tenth century Hindustan was also too far advanced than its contemporaries in the East and the West for its achievements in the realms of speculative philosophy and scientific theorizing, mathematics and knowledge of nature's workings. Hindus of the early medieval period were unquestionably superior in more things than the Chinese, the Persians (including the Sassanians), the Romans and the Byzantines of the immediate preceding centuries. The followers of Siva and Vishnu on this subcontinent had created for themselves a society more mentally evolved - joyous and prosperous too - than had been realized by the Jews, Christians, and Muslim monotheists of the time. Medieval India, until the Islamic invaders destroyed it, was history's most richly imaginative culture and one of the five most advanced civilizations of all times."

Ancient Hindu temple architecture is the most awe-inspiring, ornate and spellbinding architectural style found anywhere in the world. No artists of any historical civilization have ever revealed the same genius as ancient Hindustan's artists and artisans.

(source: [Need for Cultural pride - Revival - By Rizwan Salim](#) The Hindustan Times 9/20/1998).



Dr. Ernest Binfield Havell (1861-1934) principal to the Madras College of Art in the 1890s and left as principal of the Calcutta College of Art some 20 years later. His major ideas about Indian art theory are to be found in his two works, *Indian Sculpture and Painting* (1908) and, more important, *The Ideals of Indian Art* (1911). *The Ideals of Indian Art* was written with the express purpose of changing the prevailing European indifference to Indian art and bringing about a proper appreciation of its aesthetic qualities.

"Indian artistic expression begins from a starting-point far removed from that of the European. Only an infinitesimal number of Europeans, even of those who pass the best part of their lives in India, make any attempt to understand the philosophic, religious, mythological and historical ideas of which Indian art is the embodiment."

In other words, he was perceptive enough to see that it was vital to judge work of Indian art on the basis of standards of art criticism evolved within

the Indian tradition instead of employing European standards which were extraneous to the tradition.

(source: [Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art - By Partha Mitter](#) p. 271).

"The opposition of Western materialism to the philosophy of the East always makes it difficult for the Europeans to approach Indian art with anything like unprejudiced minds. The whole of modern European academic art-teaching has been based upon the unphilosophical theory that beauty is a quality which is inherent in certain aspects of matter or form.."

Indian thought takes a much wider, a more profound and comprehensive view of art. The Indian artist has the whole creation and every aspect of it for his field; not merely a limited section of it, mapped out by academic professors. Beauty, says the Indian philosopher, is subjective, not objective. **It is not inherent in form or matter; it belongs only to spirit, and can only be apprehended by spiritual vision. "**

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) p. 134-135).

He also pointed out the fallacy and absurdities of some Western historians to find some foreign influence on Indian art. He said:

"Indian art was inspired by Indian Nature, Indian philosophy and religious teaching, and no one."

(source: [Glimpses of Indian Culture - By Dr. Giriraj Shah](#) p. 115).

Havell thought Indian art was conceptual, aiming at the realization of 'something finer and subtle than ordinary physical beauty. The image that the Indian created came from inside his head; he had no need of a goose-pimpled model posing uncomfortably in his studio. His achievement was not that of capturing real life in art, but of giving birth to an abstract ideal. He said: " A figure with three heads, and four, six or eight arms, seems to a European a barbaric conception, though it is not less physiologically impossible than the wings growing from the human scapula in the European representation of angels.... But it is altogether foolish to condemn such artistic allegories a priori because they do not conform to the canons of the classic art of Europe. All art is suggestion and convention, and if Indian artists can suggest divine attributes to Indian people with Indian culture, they have fulfilled the purpose of their art."

Just as angels are given wings, or saints halos, or just as the Holy Spirit was portrayed as a dove, so Shiva or Vishnu were given extra arms to hold the symbols of their various attributes, or extra heads for their different roles. Havell showed how consummately the Indian artist could handle movement. Taking the example of the famous Nataraja (dancing Shiva) bronzes of south India, he first explored its symbolism. No work of Indian art is without a wealth of allegory and symbol, ignorance of which was, and still is, a major stumbling block for most non-Indians. **The Nataraja deals with the divine ecstasy of creation expressed in dance.**



"Art will always be caviare to the vulgar, but those who would really learn and understand it should begin with Indian art, for true Indian art is pure art, stripped of the superfluities and vulgarities which delight the uneducated eye. Yet Indian art, being more subtle and recondite than the classical art of Europe, requires a higher degree of artistic understanding, and it rarely appeals to European dilettanti, who with a smattering of perspective, anatomy, and rules of proportion added to their classical scholarship, aspire to be art critics, amateur painters, sculptors or architects, and these unfortunately have the principal voice in art administration in Indian."

Comparing the European and Hindu art, Havell says:

"European art has, as it were its wings clipped: it knows only the beauty of earthly things. Indian art, soaring into the highest empyrean, is ever trying to bring down to earth something of the beauty of the things above."



(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London. p.24 - 69).

Dr. James Fergusson architectural historian, has made the following observation regarding Hindu art:

"When Hindu sculpture first dawns upon us in the rails of Buddha Gaya and Bharhut, 220 to 250 B.C. it is thoroughly original, absolutely without, a trace of foreign influence, but quite capable of expressing in ideas, and of telling its story with a distinctness that never was surpassed, at least in India....For an honest, purpose-like, pre-Raphaelite kind of art, there is probably nothing much better to be found anywhere."

(source: [Indian and Eastern Architecture - By James Fergusson](#)).

Baron John Emerich Edward Dalberg Acton (1834 -1902) English historian, was greatly struck with the architecture of Dwaraka, which he calls 'the wonderful city,' and says: "The natives of that country (India) have carried the art of construction and ornamenting excavated grottoes to a much higher degree of perfection than any other people."

(source: [Geographical Ephemerides](#), Volume XXXII, p. 12).

According to **Rene Grousset** (1885-1952) French art Historian:

"The principal relief at Mallapuram is the great rock-carving known as the Gangacatarna "descent of the Ganga". This enormous sculpture is high relief, measuring nearly 30 yards in length and 23 feet in height and entirely covering one face of the cliff, groups a whole world of animals, ascetics, genii, and gods round the cascade in which sports a band of nagas and nagis, symbolic of the sacred waters. What we have before us here is a vast picture, a regular fresco in stone. **This relief is a masterpiece of classic art in the breadth of its composition, the sincerity of the impulse which draws all creatures together round the beneficent waters, and its deep, fresh love of nature. In particular we may draw attention to the ascetic prostrating himself on the left of the cascade; this amazingly realistic figure with its synthetic, rugged, and direct workmanship, at once restless and simple, has all the quality of a Rodin.**"

(source: [Civilizations of the East - By Rene Grousset](#) Vol. II, Chapter - **Farther India and the Malay Archipelago** p. 230).



The Konark war-horse, prancing into battle with a massively strong warrior striding beside it.

Of the colossal war-horse placed outside the Southern facade of the black Pagoda at Kanarak in Orissa, built about the middle of the thirteenth century by Narsingaha I, art critic **E. B. Havell** says:

"Here Indian sculptors have shown that they can express with as much fire and passion as the greatest European art the pride of victory and the glory of triumphant warfare, for not even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin marbles surpasses the magnificent movement and modelling of this Indian Achilles, and the superbly monumental war-horse in its massive strength and vigor is not unworthy of comparison with Verocchio's famous masterpieces at Venice!"

(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London. p. 147)

The Konark war-horse, prancing into battle with a massively strong warrior striding beside it, appealed to Havell because **it also showed that the Indian sculptor was quite capable of handling martial themes**. "Not even the Homeric grandeur of the Elgin marbles surpasses the magnificent movement and modeling of this Indian Achilles, and the superbly monumental war-horse with its massive strength and vigor is not unworthy of comparison with Verocchio's famous masterpiece at Venice."

(source: [India Discovered - By John Keay](#) p. 106-107).

V. S. Naipaul (1932 -) Nobel Laureate, was born in Trinidad into a family of Hindu origin is known for his penetrating analyses of alienation and exile. He has discussed some of his controversial ideas about rewriting Indian history:

"I am less interested in the Taj Mahal which is a vulgar, crude building, a display of power built on blood and bones. Everything exaggerated, everything overdone, which suggests a complete slave population. I would like to find out what was there before the Taj Mahal."

(source: [How do you ignore history?' - interview](#) - [economictimes.indiatimes.com](#) - January 13 '03).

As **J D Beglar**, the assistant-director of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), in his Report for 1871-72, wrote: "It is only after the Mughal conquest of India that Muhammadan architecture begins to be beautiful". Before that the Islamic approach to architecture was barbarous. According to the reading of the invaders, "their

religion demanded the suppression of aesthetic feelings".

Hindu art has been incomprehensible to most Western critics, particularly of the colonial era and they often used harsh epithets like 'barbarous', 'ugly', etc. to describe it. But it was not so with Huxley. He found much in Indian art to appreciate even while he used Western standards of judgment.



Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) the English novelist and essayist, born into a family that included some of the most distinguished members of the English ruling class, found:

"The Hindu architects produced buildings incomparably more rich and interesting as works of art. I have not visited Southern India, where, it is said, the finest specimen of Hindu architecture are to be found. But I have seen enough of the art in Rajputana to convince me of its enormous superiority to any work of the Mohammedans. The temples at Chittor, for example, are specimens of true classicism." "Mohammedan art tends ..to be dry, empty, barren, and monotonous. **Huxley also visited the Taj at Agra and he was much disappointed. He found the building expensive and picturesque but architecturally uninteresting.** He thought that it was elegant but its elegance was of a "very dry and negative kind", and its classicism came not from any "intellectual restraint imposed on an exuberant fancy", but

from "an actual deficiency of fancy, a poverty of imagination". **Comparing it with Hindu architecture, he said: "The Hindu architects produced buildings incomparably more rich and interesting as works of art.** According to him, its fabulous "costliness is what most people seem to like about the Taj", and that because it is made of marble. But "marble", he says, "covers a multitude of sins." Its costliness makes up for its lack of architectural merit.

It could be said that art is not Islam's forte as it repudiates it and, therefore, it has not developed. It had little to convey or communicate in the way of deeper spiritual truths. Its God was best satisfied with demolition of the shrines of "other Gods", and it was in that direction that Islam found its best self-expression." It shared this passion of demolition with other iconoclastic religions including Christianity - we forget what it did in its heyday.

(source: [On Hinduism Reviews and Reflections](#) - By Ram Swarup p.161-165).



A head of Mukhilinga, an incarnation of Lord Shiva.



Rajarajeshvara Temple, Tanjavur, completed in 1010, dedicated to Lord Shiva, the temple is superb example of southern Chola style.

Sir William Wilson Hunter (1840-1900) entered the Indian civil service in 1862. He was a man of broad cultural interests and was author of several notable volumes mainly on Indian historical subjects, acknowledges England's debt to India:

"English decorative art in our day has borrowed largely from Indian forms and patterns. The exquisite scrolls on the rock temples at Karli and Ajanta, the delicate marble tracery and flat wood-carving of Western India, the harmonious blending of forms and colors in the fabrics of Kashmir, have contributed to the restoration of tastes in England. Indian art-work, when faithful to native designs, still obtains the highest honors at the international exhibitions of Europe. "

(source: [The Indian Empire - By Sir William Wilson Hunter](#) p. 155).

Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964) first prime minister of free India, says: "The amazing expansion of Indian culture and art to other countries has led to some of the finest expressions of this art being found outside India. Unfortunately many of our old monuments and sculptures, especially in northern India, have been destroyed by invaders in course of time."

(source: [The Discovery of India - By Jawaharlal Nehru](#) p. 210).

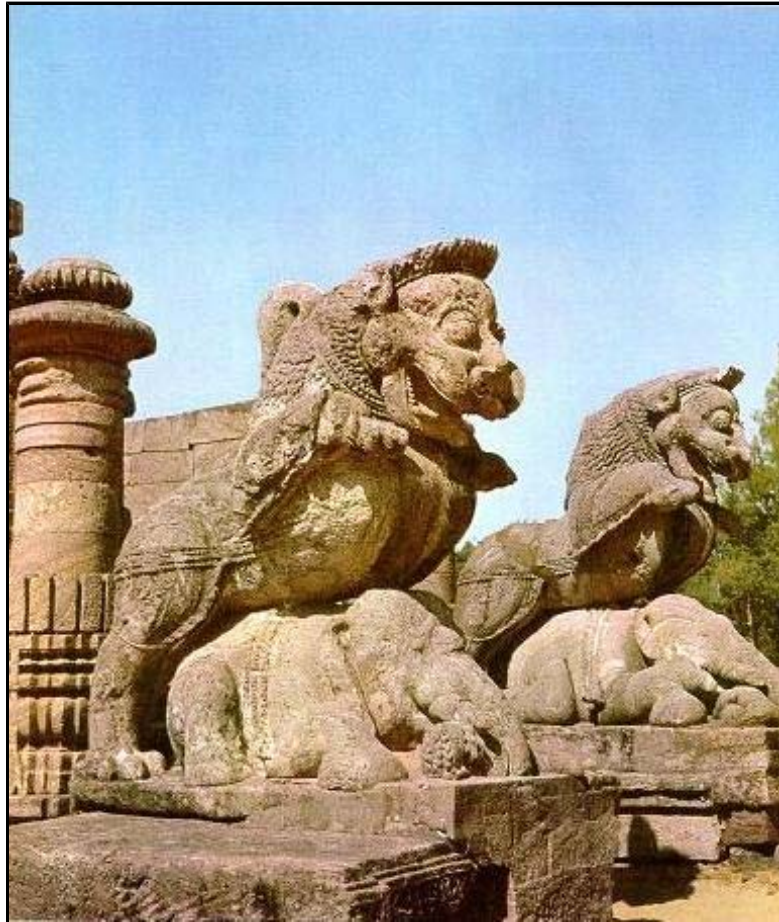
Sir Edwin Arnold (1832-1904) poet and scholar and Author of [The Song Celestial](#), which is a translation of the [Bhagavad Gita](#). His description of the Elephanta caves is very fine. He says of the statue of Ardhanareeswara:

"This statue of colossal size, is nevertheless very delicately cut, and the limbs and features possess an almost tender beauty."

In regard to Indian sculpture he writes: "Everywhere - on plinth and abacus, frieze and entablature - appears the same lavish wealth of work and fancy; for it is characteristic of the Hindu art, which the Moslem also in this respect adopted, to leave no naked plans in the stone."

He speaks of the Meenakshi temple at Madura thus: "Each gopuram looks like a mountain of bright and shifting hues, in the endless detail of which the astonished vision becomes lost....Imagine four of these carved and decorated pyramidal pagodas, each equally colossal and multi-colored with fine minor ones clustering near, anyone of which would singly make a town remarkable!"

(source: [Eminent Orientalists: Indian European American](#) - Asian Educational Services. p. 251-254).



Lions resting upon elephants guard the gateway of the Surya Deul, or Temple of the Sun in Orissa. The triumph of the lion over the elephant is thought to represent the victory of the sun over the rain.

M. Rene Grousset (1885-1952) French art historian, says: "In the high plateau of eastern Iran, in the oases of Serindia, in the arid wastes of Tibet, Mongolia, and Manchuria, in the ancient civilized lands of China and Japan, in the lands of the primitive Mons and Khmers and other tribes of Indo-China, in the countries of the Malaya-Polynesians, in Indonesia and Malay, **India left the indelible impress of her high culture, not only upon religion, but also upon art, and literature, in a word, all the higher things of spirit.**"

(source: [Civilizations of the East - By Rene Grousset](#) Vol. II, p. 276).

Captain **Philip Meadows Taylor** (1808-1876) a lieutenant in the Nizam of Hyderabad's army who learned Persian and Hindi. Author of [Confessions of a Thug](#) (1839) says of the Ellora caves:

"the carving on some of the pillars, and of the lintels and architraves of the doors, is quite beyond

description. No chased work in silver or gold could possibly be finer. But what tools this very hard, tough stone could have done wrought and polished as it is, is not at all intelligible at the present day."

(source: [Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage By Will Durant](#) MJF Books.1935 p. 601).

Colonel James Tod, after carefully examining and exploring the temple at Barolli (Rajasthan) exclaims: "To describe its stupendous and diversified architecture is impossible; it is the office of the pen alone, but the labor would be endless. **Art seems to have exhausted itself, and we are perhaps now for the first time fully impressed with the beauty of Hindu sculpture.** The columns, the ceilings, the external roofing, where each stone presents a miniature temple, one rising over another until the crown, by the urn-like kalasha, distract our attention. The carving on the capital of each column would require pages of explanation, and the whole, in spite of high antiquity, is in wonderful preservation."

"The doorway, which is destroyed, must have been curious, and the remains that choke up the interior are highly interesting. One of these specimens was entire and unrivalled in taste and beauty."

(source: [Annals & Antiquities of Rajas'than - Col. James Tod](#) Volume II. p. 704).

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Fine Arts - Timeline

1. Sindhu-Saraswati Valley Culture

The highest expression of Indian proto historic culture was the Sindhu Saraswati Valley culture, after its main center. In spite of a sense of practicality, the figures displayed on the many seals executed in stone, steatite, ceramics and metal display an advanced aesthetic quality. The copper figure of a dancer and the torsos of figures, are not treated with the rigid and coarse style typical of ancient art, but with a **delicate sensitivity of feeling for the graceful movements of the dance and the clear concept of free representation of the human figure.**

2. The Mauryan Dynasty



The Mauryans left traces of their rule in the great royal palaces of Pataliputra, the modern Patna, the capital of their empire. Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador to the Seleucids to the Court of Chandragupta Maurya, reported that the palace compared in its magnificence with the palace of Darius of Persepolis in Persia. The few ruins that survive appear to confirm this.

The Arts of the Andhra Dynasty

The Andhra dynasty known to itself on inscriptions by the name of Satavahana and by other names, enjoyed favorable political circumstances, gave rise to the finest example of rock architecture, along the northwestern and then on the east coast at Amaravati.

The Amravati School

The scenes depicted in Amaravati reliefs are generally extremely complex and lively, with characters shown moving freely both in groups and singly, and in a wide variety of stances. In the works at Nagarjunakonda and Amaravati, the silpin, or Indian artist-craftsmen, achieve a fusion of metaphysical and tactile reality, thereby attaining a unique balance that gives Indian art a special place in the history of world art. The Indian artist's unique contribution is to have created eternal values that are immediately



understood.

The Gandhara School

The school of Gandhara, which was more or less contemporary with the schools of Mathura and Amravati, developed and reached its zenith in the northwest frontier zones, especially in Afghanistan and in the area now known as Pakistan.

The Mathura School

Mathura stands on the Jumna river in western Uttar Pradesh and close to one of India's oldest cities. It lay on the main trade routes from north India to the rest of Asia, and by the time of the Maurya and Sunga dynasties (4th to 1st centuries B.C.) was not only a leading commercial and religious center and a place of pilgrimage for many different sects, but also the focal point of a highly creative literary and artistic school. The school of Mathura, with red sandstone sculptures, the material for which was quarried from the Sikri caves outside the city, was contemporary with the Gandhara school.

3. Gupta and Post-Gupta Arts

In the realm of sculpture and painting Gupta art marks the highest reach of the Indian genius. Its influence radiated over India and beyond. By the end of the Gupta period the whole region of South East Asia had been deeply influenced by Indian thought and custom especially in Indian religion. Its keynote is balance and freedom from convention. It is thoroughly Indian in spirit and is marked by classic restraint, a highly developed taste and deep aesthetic feeling. Its ideal was the combination of beauty and virtue.

Notable panels such as the Gajendra moksha, Vishnu reclining on Ananta, undoubtedly rank among the best specimens of Hindu sculpture. Samudra Gupta issued no less than eight types of gold coinage of great artistic value. Referring to the coin, which shows Samudra Gupta with the Vajra on the obverse and Lakshmi on the reverse, Percy Brown says: 'the excellent modeling of the king's figure, the skilful delineation of the features, the careful attention to details and the general ornateness of the design in the best specimens constitutes this type as the highest expression of the Gupta numismatic art.'

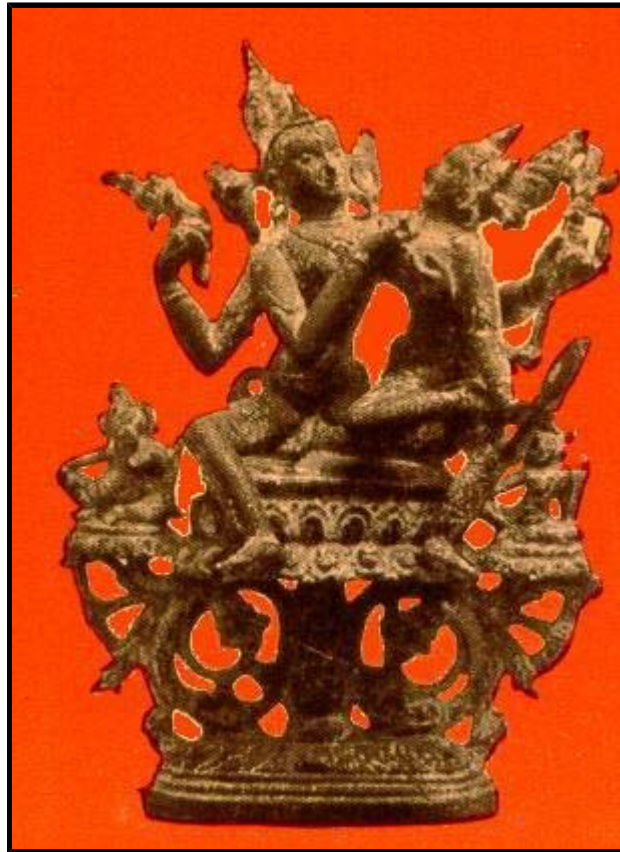
(source: [Advanced History of India - By Nilakanta Sastri and G. Srinivasachari](#) p.228-232).

The Gupta art is famous for Rupam or concept of beauty. The Gupta artists applied themselves to the worship of beautiful form in many ways. They worshipped art in order to awaken a new sense of spiritual joy and nobility. There are many distinguishing features of the Gupta art. We find both refinement and restraint. The Gupta artists relied more on elegance than on volume. Their art showed simplicity of expression and spiritual purpose. Some of the most beautiful images of Shiva belong to this period. They created the Ardhanarishvara form of Shiva where the deity is represented as half male and half female. The iron pillar near New Delhi is an outstanding example of Gupta craftsmanship. Its total height inclusive of the capital is 23 feet 8 inches. Its entire weight is 6 tons. The pillar consists of a square abacus, the melon shaped member and a capital. According to **Percy Brown**, this pillar is a remarkable tribute to the genius and manipulative dexterity of the Indian worker.

The cultural achievements of the Guptas evoked praise from the historians, both foreign and Indian. According to **L. D. Barnett**, "Gupta period is in the annals of classical India almost what periclean age is in the history of Greece."

Vincent Smith wrote: "The age of the great Gupta kings presented a more agreeable and satisfactory picture than any other period in the history of Hindu India. Literature, art and science flourished in a degree beyond ordinary and gradual changes in religion were effected without persecution."

K. M. Panikkar observed: "The two hundred years of the Gupta rule may be said to mark the climax of Hindu imperial tradition."



Uma_Maheshwara

(source: Indian and Indonesian Art - Ananda Coomaraswamy)

The poet **Kalidasa**, was one of the "Nine Jewels" a group representing the best minds of the kingdom, who were gathered together at the court of Chandragupta II, in the 5th century A.D. The figurative art of the Gupta period clearly shows that artists had a full knowledge of the best works produced and the most advanced techniques developed in the past. There was intense commercial and cultural intercourse between Asian mainland, and the influence of Gupta art spread very widely, impressing its iconographical and stylistic tendencies on many foreign artists. Chinese and Central Asian pilgrims came to India to visit the shrines and to study in the best universities in the land.

This was the Golden Age of Indian Art - of splendor and of the most flourishing artistic resurgence to occur in India.

Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy, regarded Gupta art as the:

"flower of our established tradition, a polished and perfect medium, like the Sanskrit language, for the establishment of thought and feeling. Its character is self-possessed, urbane, at once exuberant and formal...Philosophy and faith possess a common language in this art that is at once abstract and sensuous, reserved and passionate."

(source: [Ancient India - By V. D. Mahajan](#) p. 541).

A. L. Basham made the following observation about the achievement of the Gupta period: "This was surely a period of high civilization in every sense, but especially in the truest sense of the term - an age of equilibrium, when human relations reached a degree of kindliness rare in the history of the world, and the best minds of India expressed the fullness and goodness of life in imperishable art and literature."

(source: [Indian Heritage and Culture - By P. Raghuanda Rao](#) ISBN: 8120709292 p. 23).

Post Gupta Age

During the six centuries following the Gupta Age (A.D 600-1200) the chief interest in the history of Indian

art was centered around the evolution of different types of temple architecture. A number of temples were constructed. The grandest example of Orissan architecture is the famous **Sun temple of Konarak, a symphony in stone**, constructed during the reign of Narasimhadeva (1238-64). **The temple was conceived on a gigantic scale and was intended to be an architectural replica of the chariot of the sun being whirled along through the heaven by seven stately horses.** Around the basement of the temple are twelve giant wheels with beautiful carvings. At the main entrance are two caparisoned steeds straining to drag the chariot through space. The whole building is ornamented with exquisite sculptures presenting an alluring pageant of sculptured magnificence. No wonder, **Abul Fazl** was struck by the grandeur of the temple and wrote in his *Ain-I-Akbari* that "even those whose judgment is critical and who are difficult to please stand amazed at the sight."

(source: [Main Currents in Indian Culture - By S. Natarajan](#) p. 114).

Rock Temples and Monasteries

Hindu temples mostly dedicated to Shiva, were carved in the rock at Ajanta and Ellora. Rock-cut temple, 164 ft. deep, 109 ft. wide, 98 ft. high. Est. 200,000 tons of rock excavated, reputedly using 1" chisels over a span of nearly 100 years. Both as architecture and examples of decoration they were more successful, in their simplicity, than were the Buddhist temples, even though they followed the same general plan. Similar rock cut shrines are also to be found on the island of Elephanta near Mumbai and other places. In the temples dedicated to Shiva, the images do not usually crowd one upon the other, as they often do in the Buddhist shrines. All is simpler and more sober. The reliefs are placed at much greater intervals, displaying a more mature spatial concept. **The walls are decorated with life size figures depicting mythological events, giving an overall effect of monumentality and imposing power.**

The Kailasa Temple intended to be an earthly replica of Shiva's splendor, the most extensive and most sumptuous of the rock-cut shrines, worthy of being ranked among the wonders of the world

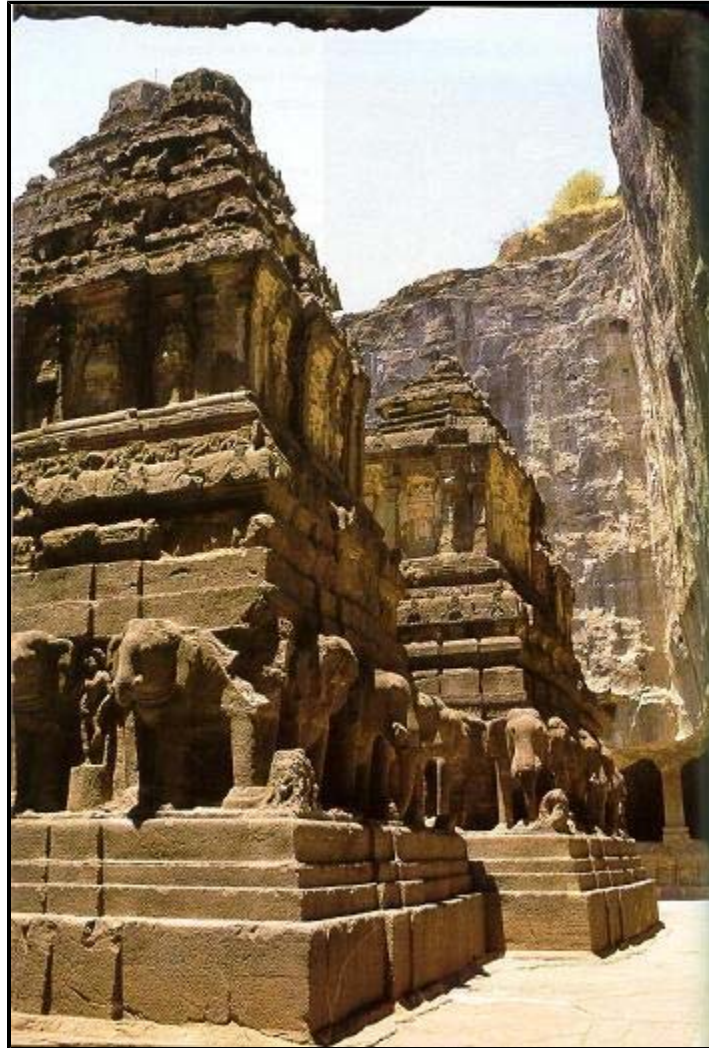
J. Griffiths wrote: "There for centuries the wild ravine and the basaltic rocks were the scene of an application of labor, skill, perseverance, and endurance that went to the excavation of these painted palaces, standing to this day as monuments of a boldness of conception and a defiance of difficulty as possible, we believe, to the modern as to the ancient Indian character. The worth of the achievement will be further evident from the fact that "much of the work has been carried on with the help of artificial light, and no great stretch of imagination is necessary to picture all that this involves in the Indian climate and in situations where thorough ventilation is impossible."

Richard Lannoy has written: "The Kailash temple at Ellora, a complete sunken Brahmanical temple carved out in the late seventh and eighth centuries A.D is over 100 feet high, the largest structure in India to survive from ancient times, larger than the Parthenon. This representation of Shiva's mountain home, Mount Kailash in the Himalaya, took more than a century to carve, and three million cubic feet of stone were removed before it was completed. **An inscription records the exclamation of the last architect on looking at his work: "Wonderful! O How could I ever have done it?"**

In Europe's middle ages, the great cathedrals, including the one of Chartres, rose from the ground upwards to the sky, supported not so much by stone as by the powerful religious symbolism that drove the Christian church. In India, the craftsmen did not build, but removed the earth and stone to discover space in the service of a different religious symbolism, not one identified with any religious monolith, but instead, one to which different religious groups owed allegiance. Here Lannoy is more precise:

"A hollowed-out space in living rock is a totally different environment from a building constructed of quarried stone. The human organism responds in each case with a different kind of empathy. Buildings are fashioned in sequence by a series of uniformly repeatable elements, segment by segment, from a foundation upwards to the conjunction of walls and roof; the occupant empathizes with a visible tension between gravity and soaring tensile strength. Entering a great building is to experience an almost imperceptible tensing in the skeletal muscles in response to constructional tension. Caves, on the other hand, are scooped out by a downward plunge of the chisel from ceiling to floor in the direction of gravity; the occupant empathizes with an invisible but sensed resistance, an unrelenting presence in the rock enveloping him; sculpted images and glowing pigments on the skin of the rock well forth from the deeps. To enter an Indian cave sanctuary is to experience a relaxation of physical tension in response to the implacable weight and density of solid rock."

(source: [Decolonizing History: Technology and Culture in India, China and the West 1492 to the Present Day - By Claude Alvares](#) p.72-73).



Kailasa temple, Ellora

The greatest wonder of rock-cut in the world. One of the wonders of the world on account of their huge dimensions and elaborate carvings.

Rizwan Salim writes about the beauty of **Kailasa**:

"Gaze in wonder at the Kailas Mandir in the Ellora cave and remember that it is carved out of a solid stone hill, an effort that (inscriptions say) took nearly 200 years. **This is art as devotion.** The temple built by the Rashtrakuta kings (who also built the colossal sculpture in the Elephanta caves off Mumbai harbour) gives proof of the ancient Hindus' religious fervor. **But the Kailas temple also indicated a will power, a creative imagination, and an intellect eager to take on the greatest of artistic challenges.** The descendents of those who built the magnificent temples of Bhojpur and Thanjavur, Konark and Kailas, invented mathematics and urban surgery, created mind-body disciplines (yoga) of astonishing power, and built mighty empires would almost certainly have attained technological superiority over Europe."

(source: [Need for Cultural pride - Revival - By Rizwan Salim](#) The Hindustan Times 9/20/1998). For more on Kailasa, refer to [World Mysteries](#)).

K. De B. Codrington notes the technical skills of the builders of the Kailash temple at Ellora:

"The monolithic Kailas temple of Ellora, with its stupendous sculptures, is a **marvel of engineering, unsurpassed by any in the world...**" The Kailas (very closely resembling in its outlines the Everest Peak, as

Havell has demonstrated) has been scooped out of a hill, and stands four-square in a court yard hewn from solid rock, complete with gateways, nandi pavilion, staircases on either side, porches and subsidiary shrines – formed by the chisel, and sculptured from top to bottom without fault! "

(source: [The Legacy of India](#) - Edited by G. T. Garrett p. 94).

Robert Payne (1911-) an American critic, and author of [The splendors of Asia : India, Thailand, Japan](#), in the Kailasa temple at Ellora, for instance, he sees "**nothing less than the mountain of creation**. It was here that Siva hammered out the shapes of men and women of fables and mythologies of universes and eternities." he writes. **He is awed by the sweep of imagination, the exuberance and tumult of creation itself, depicted in stone.**

(source: [spectrum: tribuneindia.com](#)).

About the truth and precision of the work, which are no less admirable than its boldness and extent, **J. Griffiths** has the following glowing testimony:

"During my long and careful study of the caves I have not been able to detect a single instance where a mistake has been made by cutting away too much stone; for if once a slip of this kind occurred, it could only have been repaired by the insertion of a piece which would have been a blemish."

(source: [The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave-Temple of Ajanta - By John Griffiths](#)).

Percy Brown (1872-1955) has said:

"The temple of Kailasa at Ellora is not only the most stupendous single work of art executed in India, but as an example of rock architecture it is unrivalled. Standing within its precincts and surrounded by its grey and hoary pavilions, one seems to be looking through into another world, not a world of time and space, but one of intense spiritual devotion expressed by such an amazing artistic creation hewn out of the earth itself. Gradually one becomes conscious of the remarkable imagination which conceived it, the unstinted labor which enabled it to be materialized and finally the sculpture with which it is adorned, this plastic decoration is its crowning glory, something more than a record of artistic form, it is a great spiritual achievement, every portion being a rich statement glowing with our meaning. **The Kailasa is an illustration of one of those rare occasions when men's minds, hearts, and hands work in unison towards the consummation of a supreme ideal. It was under such conditions of religious and cultural stability that this grand monolith representation of Shiva's paradise was produced.**"

"The Kailasa Temple, it is safe to say, is one of the most astonishing 'buildings' in the history of architecture. This shrine was not constructed of stone on stone, it was in fact not constructed at all: it was carved, sculpted in toto from the volcanic hillside! A squared, U-shaped trench was first cut into the slope to a depth of close to 100 feet. The 'liberated' mass in the center was then patiently carved from the living rock to produce a freestanding, two-story Hindu temple of dazzling complexity. The temple, which is dedicated to Shiva, the often threatening god of the Hindu trilogy, measures 109 feet wide by 164 feet long. It stands on an elevated plinth to attain greater presence in its tight surroundings. The complex consists of entry, Nandi (i.e. bull) shrine, open porch, main hall, and inner sanctum. Various scaled panels, friezes, and sculpture highlight many surfaces."

(source: [Indian Architecture: Buddhist and Hindu - By Percy Brown](#) - Publisher: D. B. Taraporevala Sons & Co. Private Ltd. Bombay p. 90).

Historian **Romesh C. Dutt** (1848-1909) writes: "**The Kailasa...is imposing in its solid grandeur.**"

(source: [The Civilization of India - By R. C. Dutt](#) p. 73).

Perhaps the most spectacular example is the Kailashanatha temple at Ellora, which is a transition from the rock-cut to the free standing style, wholly cut from the rock of the hillside, to which no further material was added. The plan of a free-standing temple is rigorously adhered to and it is stylistically close to the southern temple. The Kailasa temple is approximately of the same area as the Parthenon at Athens and is one and a half times higher than the Greek structure. The number of stone cutters and workmen employed and the expense involved in cutting the temple must have been immense.

S. Natarajan has remarked: "It is an enormous shrine carved wholly out of an isolated block of stone with a number of sculptures characterized by dramatic pose and beauty of movement, fine modeling and sculptural accuracy in carving. Particularly remarkable is the skill with which different emotions are portrayed. In the sculpture of Ravana trying to lift the Kailasa, the serene calmness of Shiva and the excitement and fear of Parvati as she clings to Shiva for support are quite visible portrayed. In the dread dance of Shiva the principle of universal violence and unrestrained ecstasy in destruction are brought out while the "Relief of the Kiss" portrays the infinite bliss of divine love."

(source: [Main Currents in Indian Culture - By S. Natarajan](#) p. 116).

Says **Ernest Binfield Havell**:

"The design of the Kailasa remained, for all time, the perfect model of a Shivalinga, - the temple craftsman's vision of Shiva's wondrous palace in his Himalayan glacier, where in his Yogi's cell the Lord of the Universe, the great magician, controls the cosmic forces by the power of thought; the holy rivers, creating the life in the world below, enshrined in His matted locks; Parvati, His other Self, the Universal Mother, watching by His side."

(source: [The Splendour That Was 'Ind' - By K T Shah](#) p. 153-154).

Sculptors had by this time acquired a thorough knowledge of anatomy, and were able to give expression to a great range of movement and gesture. They were able to give material form to the sensuous visions of the poets by their masterly handling of the female shape, creating a form of art unparalleled elsewhere. Indian art is rich in representations of the female body, a subject in which Indian artists appear to have excelled since earliest times.



*O' artisan, genius of a man !
Look at your lustrous creation .
You speak poetry with your tools ,
You give life to a structure of stone !
O' artisan, genius of a man !
You are the pride of my nation !*

Hindu artists accepted the sensual and erotic as integral part of life, and death with them accordingly in their carvings, paintings and writing. To some Western eyes, used to Victorian standards, the results may appear offensive, but these have a calm dignity far removed from the more self-conscious efforts of lesser artists.

In classic Sanskrit treatises, the sculptor has been given various names. He is known as the *Sadhak* (Admirer), the *Mantrin* (Wizard), and the *Yogi* (Visionary). This is perhaps explained by the ultimate aim of the sculptor to be primarily spiritual and only secondarily aesthetic. The sculptor was not endeavoring to portray the mere perfection of the physical structure, as with the Greeks. He believed that even the perfect human figure could not fully

manifest the higher spiritual values of life, nor contain within itself the attributes and qualities of the divinity.

Therefore, to give expression to such abstract conceptions, the sculptor consciously set for himself an ideal, which was not based on the contemplation of the natural form, but upon meditation of the divine form. Consequently, you would notice a distinctive power of suggestiveness in the sculpted forms. Perhaps their supreme function, the idols and forms suggest attributes and possibilities beyond the range of mortals. But every time the chisel carved a shape, it was based on *Shilpashastras* (axioms of sculpture). Drawing inspiration from the mind, mythology and experiences, the sculptor has left behind an impression that cannot be ravaged even by time itself. Perhaps.

Monumental Images

Art of the Pallava Dynasty

The Pallava dynasty succeeded the Andhra dynasty in the east Deccan in about the 5th century and endured until around the end of the 9th century. Like that of the Gupta kings, the court of the Pallava rulers was a center for eminent men of letters and art. It is known from contemporary inscriptions that Mahendra-varman (600-635), who was called the Temple Builder, was a great patron of the arts, particularly architecture. Unfortunately none of his construction have survived.

Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren (1760-1842) says: "It is without an involuntary shudder that we pass the threshold of these spacious grottoes, and compare the weight of these ponderous roofs with the apparent slenderness and inadequacy of its support, an admirable and ingenious effect which must have required no ordinary share of abilities in the architect to calculate and determine!" He concludes: "Such are the seven pagodas or ancient monuments so-called, at Mavalipuram on the Coromandel (Cholamandal) coast, of which extraordinary buildings it will be hardly too much to assert that they will occupy a most distinguished place in the scale of human skill and ingenuity."

(source: [Historical Reseraches](#) Volume II. p. 78).



The five raths at Mamallapuram are named after the Pandavas, the heroes of Mahabharata.

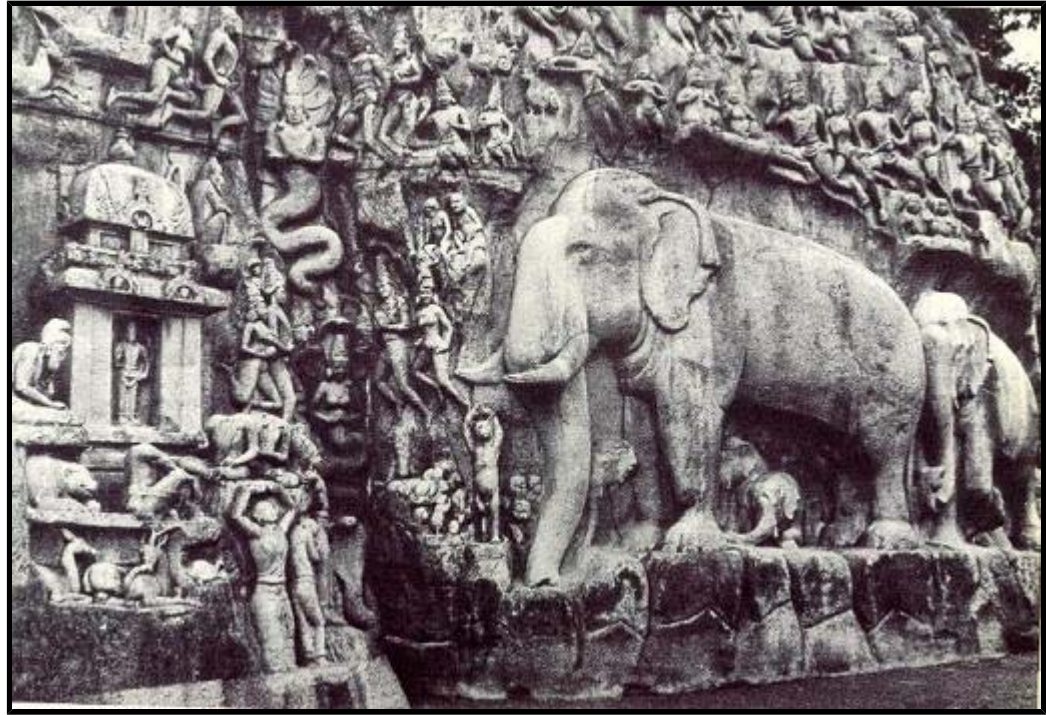
Cave Temples, Regal Arts and Architecture

Many cave temples were excavated and carved in the same period in the region between Tiruchirappalli and the Krishna estuary. These temples were mostly dedicated to Lord Shiva. King Narasimha-varman (625-645) built the port of Mamallapuram, near Chennai, where he ordered the excavation of many rock temples. He also enriched his citadel with five raths, open air sculptures rather than temples, since they were carved out of isolated rock outcrops to imitate real temples. **The five raths at Mamallapuram are named after the Pandavas, the heroes of Mahabharata.** The abundant decoration on the upper stories of these buildings gives them a baroque air, an effect which was maintained and elaborated in medieval India. The Gangahara Relief at Tiruchirappalli is a work of remarkable plastic worth and is charged with vitality and expressive force. The finest sculptured work at Mallapuram, which is also the major achievement of Pallava sculptors, is the **Descent of the Ganga**, carved out of a granite rock. A split running down the rockface provides the channel for the water representing the sacred river. The subject is taken from an episode in the Kiratarjuniya, by the 6th century poet Bharavi. A whole world of human and divine beings, entire families of animals in the most varied postures, monkeys, elephants and cats, all issue as it were from the living rock to pay homage to Lord Shiva for his miraculous gift to them of the Ganga springing down from the mountain. The work is rich in detail of all kinds, and is completely successful aesthetically, whether looked at as a whole or in detail. **This colossal work achieved a synthesis between Gupta elegance and the lively narrative art of the Amaravati school.**

"Indian Art " says art critic E. B. Havell "is always super ably decorative." "The best Indian Sculpture touched a deeper note of feeling and finer sentiments than the best Greek. There is in

this art a depth and spirituality which never entered into the soul of Greece."

(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London. p.144).



Descent of Ganga, Pallava early 7th century relief carved in granite

Rashtrakuta dynasty who were undoubtedly responsible for a number of cave temples excavated in the rock at Ellora, which was the capital of the early kings of the dynasty. The temple of Dharmanatha at Malwa and the temple of Shiva at Elephanta may also be attributed to them. The most important Rashtrakuta temple is the Kailasnath temple, which was constructed in the reign of Krishna I (757-83). The style of the Kailasnath temple is characterized by pyramidal roofs sloping down to great quadrangular pilasters, which are balanced by thick projecting cornices and panels decorated with sculpture. The sculptures on the inner walls of the main shrine show flying spirits in audacious and exciting, but also extremely elegant postures. The reliefs in the sanctuary of Shiva rely on the visual effects obtainable from chiaroscuro, or light and shadow, and broken movement.

The theatrical effect evident 200 years earlier at Elephanta reaches a climactic conclusion in the Kailasa where the image of Ravana in one relief panel is actually detached from its background so that the action takes place on a deeply shadowed stone stage. The Kailasa is indeed a daring undertaking that speaks eloquently both of the creative genius of the architect and the driving enthusiasm of Krishna I.

Originally, both exterior and interior of this rock-cut temple carried painted adornment over a thin layer of plaster. In certain areas, three layers of paint are discernible, indicating the continual refurbishment of the mural decoration. Further confirmation of such renewal of the murals come from 16th century Muslim accounts which speak of the Kailasa as Rang Mahal or Colored Mansion.



15th century Chariot-temple in Hampi, Karnataka "The large stone chariot in the Vithala temple is a marvelous testimony to the skill of the stone carvers - its wheels can rotate on the axle. The carved pillars in the Hall of Musical Pillars resound like musical instruments.

Chola dynasty ruled from 907 to 1053 in south India. The period was one of comparative peace and prosperity, and saw the production of a considerable amount of notable art. The magnificent temples which were built in south Indian cities were not only religious centers, but also as factors in the economic and social unification of the religion. Temples were built in exaggerated manner, rising up very steeply from the plinth to a lofty pyramidal tower ending in a wide cupola. The temple of Shiva at Tanjore, has a tower of 190 feet high rising from a 180 foot base. The tower is surmounted by a slab weighing eighty tons. The gopura, or main doors, also assumed great importance taking on a monumental quality under the succeeding Pandya dynasty. The great temples of South India are marvels of massive construction. All of the southern kingdoms fell before the Moslem invasion of the 14th century. The Muslim invasion in India and their iconoclastic zeal snapped further development of art and gradually choked its perennial flow of inspiration. Because art in all phases thrives only in peace and security. The Meenakshi temple, is a spectacular pastiche of South Indian architecture, the shrine housing the deity dates from the 12th century.

According to the great Indian historian **R. C. Majumdar** (1888-1980): "Those monolithic temples wrought out of massive stone, are complete with all the details of an ordinary temple and stand today as an undying testimony to the superb quality of Pallava art."

(source: [Indian Heritage and Culture - By P. Raghuanda Rao](#) ISBN: 8120709292 p.30).

Dr. James Fergusson writes this about the Hullabid Temple:

"All the pillars of the Parthenon are identical, while no two faces of the Indian temple are the same; every convolution of every scroll is different. No two canopies in the whole building are alike, and every part exhibits a joyous exuberance of fancy, scorning every mechanical restraint. All that is wild in human faith or warm in human feeling is found portrayed on these walls..."

Gravity Pillar



This temple was built in 12th century AD and is an example of medieval art in India. It took 103 years to complete. The temple's exterior is made of beautifully carved stone with sculptures and friezes. Inside, the temple is decorated with richly carved panels and pillars. **There is a tall pillar in the centre of the temple courtyard which is balanced by gravity alone, there is no material cementing it.**

The 40 foot tall and 20,000 kg stone 'gravity pillar' stands in the courtyard of the **Chennakesava** temple, built by **Vishnuvardhana** (1110-1140 A. D) in Belur.

The engineers made a meticulous study of the wind force, at the place, calculating a height and weight for the stone pillar which could stand for all time. The pillar has been without any hole, hook, peg or cementing of any sort to hold it. There is a channel running from end to end at the base, through which one can pass a stick, proving that the pillar neither fully rests on the platform nor is dug into it.

Speaking of the Halebid Temple, **Vincent A. Smith** wrote: "One of the most marvelous exhibitions of human labor to be found even in the patient East! The architectural frame-work, it will be observed, is used mainly as a back ground for the display of an infinity of superb decorations, which leaves no space uncovered and gives the eye no rest."

"Hindu sculpture," says **E. B. Havell**, "has produced a master piece in the great stone alto-relievo of **Durga slaying the demon Mahisha**, found at Singasari in Java, and now in the the Ethnographic Musuem, Leyden..Judge by any standard it is a wonderful work of art, grandly composed, splendidly thorough in technique, expressing the extraordinary power and concentrated passion the wrath and might of the Supreme Benificence roused to warfare with Spirit of Evil. The student will find in this phase of Indian imaginative art an intensity of feeling - a wonderful suggestion of elemental passion transcending all the feeble emotions of humanity - a revelation of powers of the unseen which nothing in European art has ever approached, unless it be in the creations of Michel Angleo or in the music of Wagner!"

(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) p. 62).

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Wonders of Elephanta (Gharapuri Caves)

A notable achievement of architectural sculpture in Western India during this period are the cave temples on the island of Elephants (Gharapuri) in the Mumbai harbor. There are altogether seven caves on the island. The central one contains some masterpieces of sculpture representing some of the 16 lila-murtis of Shiva as Nataraja, Lakulisa, Andhakari, Gangadhara, Atdhanariswara, Somaskanda, Ravananugraha, etc. But the best representation of Shiva is as Mahesamurti, otherwise known as Trimurti.

Describing the image of Mahesamurti, **François-Auguste-René Rodin** (1840-1917) French sculptor has said:

"This full, pouting mouth, rich in sensuous expressions, these lips like a lake of pleasure, fringed by the noble, palpitating nostrils."

(source: [Civilizations of the East - By Rene Grousset](#) Vol. II, p. 245-246).

According to French art historian, **Rene Grousset** (1885-1952) who speaks of the Trimurti statue at

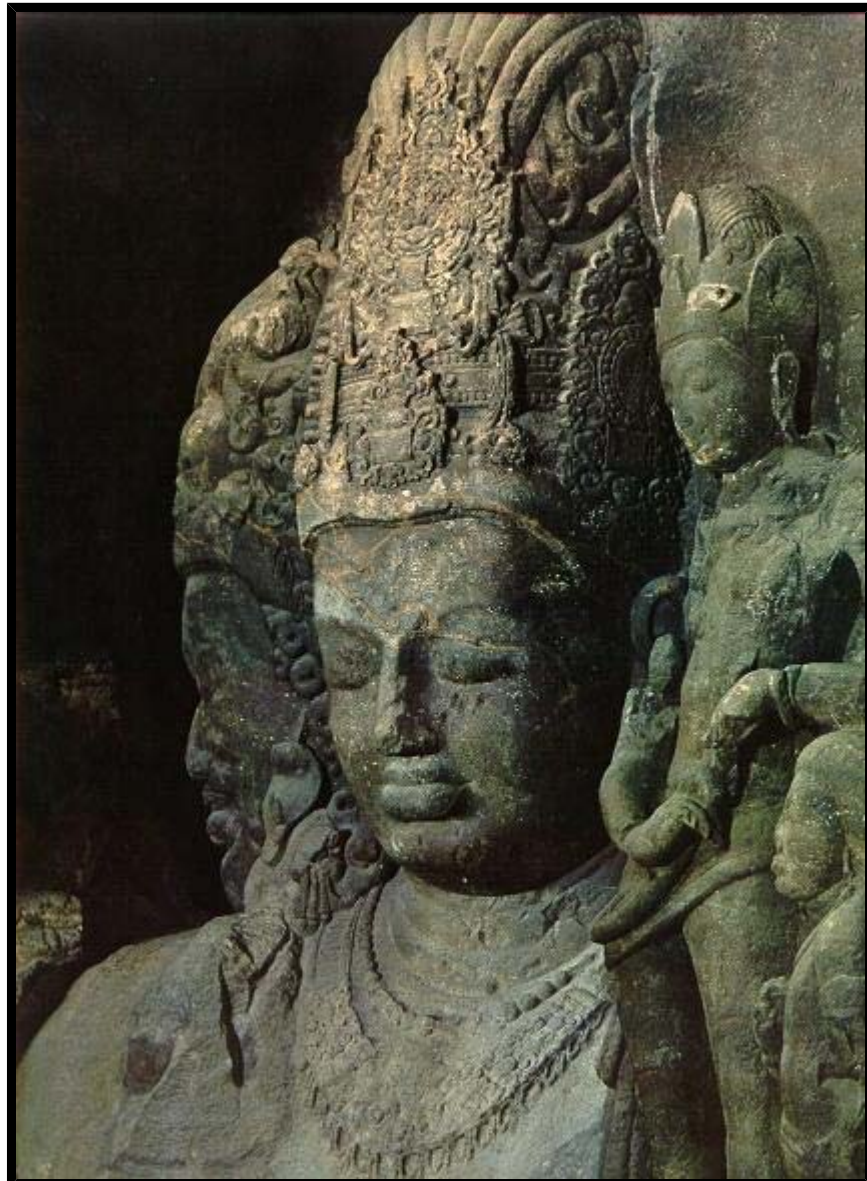
Elephanta Caves:

"**Universal art has succeeded in few materialization of the Divine as powerful and also as balanced.** He believed that it is "the greatest representation of the pantheistic god created by the hands of man." He concludes with poetic enthusiasm: "Never have the overflowing sap of life, the pride of force superior to everything, the secret intoxication of the inner god of things been so serenely expressed."

(source: [The India I Love - By Marie-Simone Renou](#) p. 88-93).

In the words of Rene Grousset, " The three countenances of the one being are here harmonized without a trace of effort. There are few material representations of the divine principle at once as powerful and as well balanced as this in the art of the whole world. Nay, more, here we have undoubtedly the grandest representation of the pantheistic God ever made by the hand of man...Indeed, never have the exuberant vigor of life, the tumult of universal joy expressing itself in ordered harmony, the pride of a power superior to any other, and the secret exaltation of the divinity immanent in all things found such serenely expressed."

(source: [The Civilization of the East – India - by Rene Grousset](#) p.245 - 6).



*Maheshmurti: One of the most profoundly moving images of Shiva ever created.
(source: Ways to Shiva - Joseph Dye).*

This is the glory of Elephanta, and few visitors can fail to be moved by this powerful, compelling image hailed by art historian Percy Brown as "the creation of a genius". The three faces represent Shiva in his different manifestations. Here, Indian art has found one of its most perfect expressions, particularly the huge high reliefs in the main cave.

The giant triple-headed Maheshmurti, is 18 foot high sculpture represents the supreme aspect of Shiva, which embodies not only the creator and destroyer but also the maintainer of the cosmos. The three massive heads have been conceived as a psychological and aesthetic whole, with the central serene face providing a focus for the formal design. The central image of the Great God (Shiva Mahadeva) presents a mood which is detached and other worldly, and represents Shiva in his Tatpuruṣa aspect, which is the supreme, serene, and beneficent one.

The most outstanding of early caves is located on the small island of Elephanta, outside Mumbai. It is dedicated to Lord Shiva. This is the most elaborate and important large pillared excavation with more than 16,000 square feet of floor space, depicting various aspects of Shiva. He is represented in numerous manifestations, such as the Great Ascetic (Yogishvara), Lord of the Dancers (Nataraja), dual male and female aspect (Ardhanarishvara) and the Descent of the river Ganga (Gangahara). Also impressive among the works are the giant door-guardian figures who stand flanking the four portals to the temple. Unfortunately, these figures, and the majority of the relief panels, have suffered extensive damage, from an early Portuguese military garrison.

The scale and magnificence of the main cave suggests that it was a royal commission. The personal characteristics of the three gods are clearly marked on their faces: they have in common a brooding assurance of their supreme divinity. The sculptor was a master able to combine the three heads into a homogenous bust to create a unique effigy. While the broad shoulders seem to belong to the central face, they also meld convincingly with the other two heads in profile. The caves of Elephanta, with the powerful and subtle Trimurti, date to Gupta period, the Golden Age of India.

Frijof Capra (1939-) the famous theoretical high-energy physicist has observed:

" A superb sculpture of Shiva in the Hindu temple of Elephanta shows three faces of the god.....in the center the sublime union, of the two aspects in the magnificent head of Shiva Maheshvara, the Great Lord, radiating serene tranquility and transcendental aloofness. In the same temple, Shiva is also represented in androgynous form – half male, half female – the flowing movement of the god's body and the serene detachment of his/her face symbolizing, again, the dynamic unification of the male and female."

(source: [The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism](#) - By Fritjof Capra p. 148-149).

"One of my first excursions in Bombay was to the famous Elephanta (Gharapuri) caves, a magnificent ancient temple dedicated to Shiva with huge stone sculptures representing the god in his many manifestations. **I stood in awe in front of those powerful sculptures whose reproductions I had known and loved for many years: the triple image of Shiva Mahesvara, the Great Lord, radiating serene tranquility and peace; Shiva Ardhanari, the stunning unification of male and female forms in the rhythmic, swaying movement of the deity's androgynous body and in the serene detachment of his/her face; and Shiva Nataraja the celebrated four-armed Cosmic Dancer whose superbly balanced gestures express the dynamic unity of all life.**" "I had a more powerful experience of Shiva sculpture in the Ellora caves. The beauty and power of these sacred caves are beyond words. "

(source: [Uncommon Wisdom](#) - By Fritjof Capra p 306 - 309).



While the iconography of Indian art was incomprehendingly received as the repository of esoteric wisdom or the outcome of demonic



Maheshvara-mūrti, Elephanta, detail; eighth century.

religion, early travelers did not hesitate to reflect on the architectural grandeur of the Hindu temples and the delicate craftsmanship of the surface sculptures on them. They were ready to appreciate the skill involved in the excavations. The cave temples near Bombay and Goa, notably Elephanta, Hanheri, and Mandapeswar, thus came to the notice of Europeans. **Initially these temples suffered at the hands of religious zealots as attempts were made to convert them into Christian churches.** From **G. P. Maffei** (1588), the official historian of Jesuit missions, we learn that after purging one of the temples at Elephanta of all previous profanations, **Father Antoine** had dedicated it to God. **Presumably the building was aesthetically pleasing enough to be consecrated to God so long as it could be cleansed of its pagan association.**

In the midst of unrelenting hostility there are occasional grudging tributes to Elephanta. Father Gasper reported that many monuments of skill and magnificence were to be seen in India. Maffei himself remarked about temples "which are able to compete in magnificence with the most superb of ancient Rome." Later, the Jesuit historian, **Du Jarrie** (1608), also praised '**Temples fort somptueux and magnifiques**'

Garcia da Orta remarked that Elephanta was a fine sight when he first arrived from Portugal in 1534, but was becoming the pasture ground of local cattle, while **Diego du Couto** lamented the imminent destruction of '**one of the most beautiful things in the world**'.

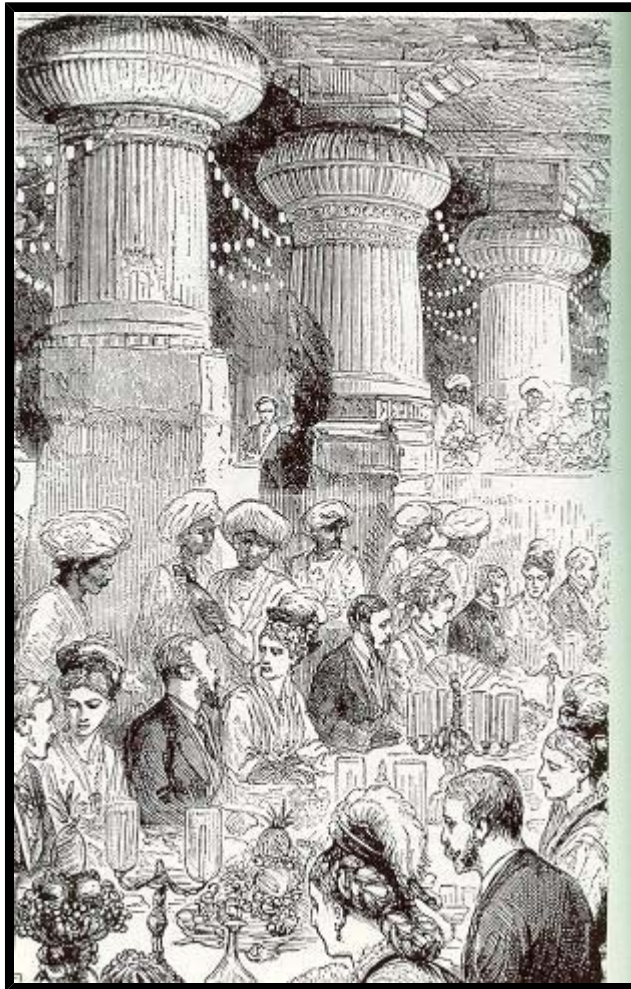
Partha Mitter has written: "After suffering from the depredations of Portuguese soldiers they began to attract men of letters, visitors in the age of Humanism who brought with them certain powers of observation.

The cave temples lend themselves easily to romanticization because of their grand conception and massive scale, of the interplay of light and shadow within and without them and finally on account of the wonderful visual dialogue between the simplicity of the total conception and the richness of decorative details. It was they who spread the news that these monuments were some of the greatest wonders of the world. "

The name Elephanta and that to Indians was known as Puri (Gharapuri). The name Elephanta originated from the large sculpture of an elephant that stood at the entrance to the temple, but has now disappeared.

The next visitor to Elephanta was the statesman **Joao de Castro**, a remarkable man and Renaissance personality with wide-ranging interests and accomplishments. Castro's navigational diary **Roteiro de Goa ate Dio** reflects a deep feeling of wonder on his part at the sight of the huge and magnificent temple at Elephanta, for **he was thoroughly overwhelmed by the great 'boldness' of manner in which the whole edifice was hewn out of the hard, solid rock. A work of such magnitude and artifice, he declared, could not have been produced by mortals and it must be regarded as one of the wonders of the world.** Castro was so impressed by the sculptures that he stated that "Indeed the proportions and symmetry with which each figure and everything else is made it would be worth the while of any painter to study it even if he were Apelles."

Diego du Couto whose career spanned a period of fifty years in India during which time he gradually came to appreciate the splendors of the cave temples of Elephanta. He took elaborate measurements of the 'remarkable' and 'stupendous' temple, remarking that it was laid on a north-to-south axis. He took enormous pains to go through the sculptural panels on every single wall in the main temple which were then described with great precision and care. The elaborate plastic treatment of Shiva's matted hair with beautiful jewels set in it especially fascinated Couto who mentioned it admiringly on several occasions in his seventh Decade of his Asia book. We also learn from Couto, that the Elephanta interior was covered with a fine coat of lime and bitumen composition which 'made the Pagoda (temple) so bright, that it looked very beautiful and was worth seeing.' The colors have faded since in Elephanta, and only Couto's testimony remains to tell us how splendid it looked in the sixteenth century.



Banquet in Elephanta Caves for the Prince of Wales in 1875

The veritable apotheosis of Elephanta came in 1875, when a grand banquet was held in the main cave in honor of the Prince of Wales who was visiting India, **'the brightest jewel in the Imperial crown.'**

The Englishman **John Ovington** (1696) author of **"A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689,"** was specially fascinated by the animal sculpture in Elephanta: "Here likewise are the just dimensions of a Horse Carved in Stone, so lively with such a Colour and Carriage and the shape finish't with that Exactness, that many have Fancied it, at a distance, a living Animal, than only a bare Representation."

According to the Cambridge man, **Dr. Fryer**, Elephanta too was a 'miraculous Piece hew'd out of solid stone; it is supported with Forty two Corinthian Pillars, being a Square, open on all sides but towards the East; where stands a statue with three Heads, crowned with strange Hieroglyphics.' He noted with regret that the Portuguese 'strive to erase the reminders of this Herculean Work, that it may sink into oblivion of its Founders.'

(source: [Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art - By Partha](#)

[Mitter](#) p 31 - 41 and 118-119).

Refer to [A Map of Sacred Stories of the Ancient World - Contributed to this site by Dom Sturiale of Sydney, Australia](#). Refer to [The World of Myth - By Ramesh N Rao - sulekha.com](#)).

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European reaction to Indian Art - Western stereotyping of Indian art and culture

A failure of Western culture to come to terms with Hindu arts

In the early period of European explorations of Asia, travelers saw Hindu sacred images as infernal creatures and diabolic multiple-limbed monsters. The most famous of all stereotypes was that of monsters, presented in books as authentic portrait of Indian gods. From the earliest date the Christian Church had taught that all pagan religions were invented by the devil. The typical reactions of an early Western travelers were bound to reflect **certain prejudices stemming from his Christian background as well as total ignorance of Hindu iconography.**

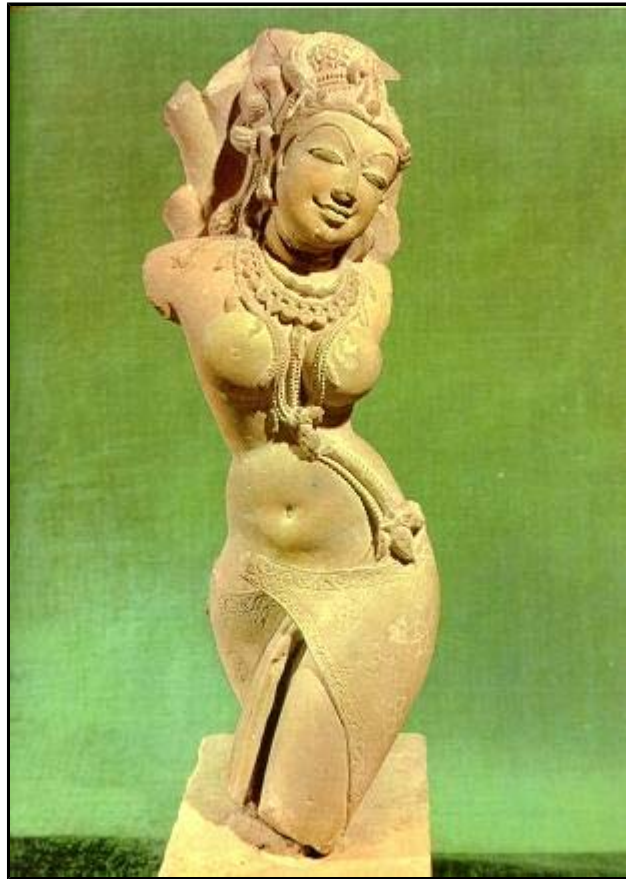
The friar **Odoric of Pordenone**, who visited a number of places in south India between 1316-1318, gave a much fuller report of India and its inhabitants and their customs than did Marco Polo. He was the first traveler to leave a description of a monstrous idol in the form of half-human and half-ox. Odoric took the colossal Buddha figure in the Khotan area to be the devil.

Ralph Fitch, traveling between 1583-1591, was the first Englishman to report that the Hindu idols in Bijapur looked like the devil.

This is was when the British Raj embarked on a reconstruction of India's past in an effort to cope with the complexities of the conquered territories. After all, the secret of political control lay in a sound knowledge of the subject people.

The British writing suffered from being imprisoned with the Victorian framework. Their unwillingness to accept Indian art on its own terms was certainly due to the puritanical norms of the Victorian times.

Few were capable of understanding the supreme abstraction of Hindu philosophy. What they overlooked was the fact that Hindu art belonged to an entirely different world of imagination, one that did not correspond to the classical ideals. In early travel accounts Hind gods masquerade as pagan monsters. These travelers had been taught by the Church that all non-Christian religions were demonic. **William Finch**, who followed him in the years, 1608-1611, described the temples as, "pagoda, which are stone images of monstrous men fearful to behold." Most travelers followed the medieval traditions in calling Hindu gods the devil. After all, had not the Church Fathers taught that all pagan gods were demons and devils?



Vrikshaka, a Tree Goddess from a Hindu temple - 8th century

This figure, together with the similar yakshis, which also combine a woman and tree motif, is one of the most beautiful types in Hindu art. It combines plasticity, decorative beauty and joyful expression into an aesthetically satisfying whole.

This carving is now preserved in the Archaeological Museum, Gwalior India.

A good deal of hostile or unsympathetic western criticism of Indian civilization has been directed in the past against its aesthetic side and taken the form of disdainful or violent depreciation of its fine arts, architecture, sculpture and painting. This aesthetic side of a people's culture is of the highest importance and demands almost as much scrutiny and carefulness of appreciation as the philosophy, religion and central formative ideas which have been the foundation of Indian life and of which much of the art and literature is a conscious expression in significant aesthetic forms. The Indian mind in its natural poise finds it almost or quite as difficult really, that is to say, spiritually to understand the arts of Europe, as the ordinary European mind to enter into the spirit of Indian painting and sculpture.

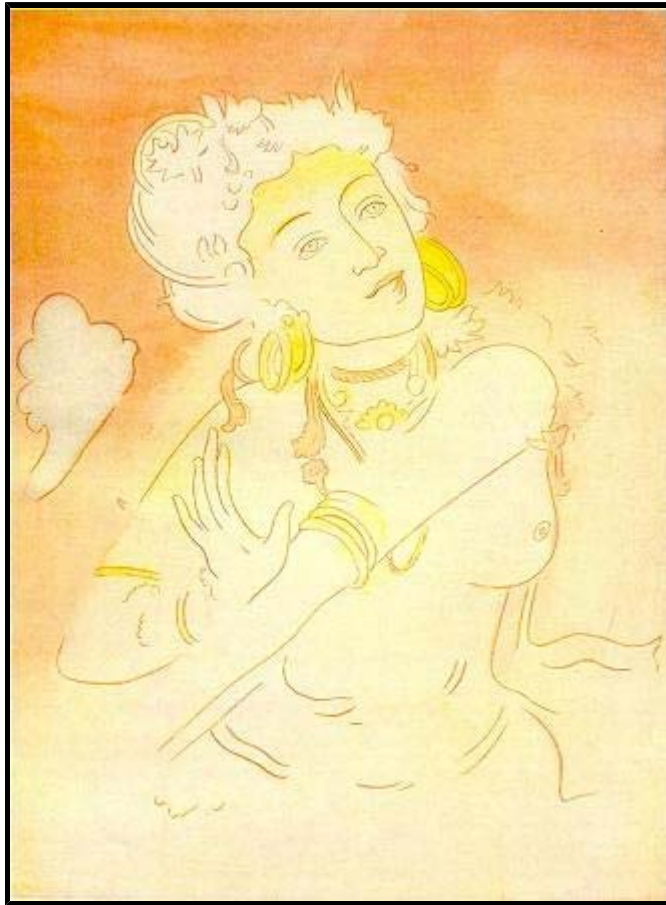
(source: [The Foundations of Indian Art - By Sri Aurobindo](#) p.196).

Alfred Maskell wrote about Indian art in his book [Ivories](#)

" We feel that the artist has been ever bound and enslaved by the traditions of Hindoo mythology. we are met at every turn by the interminable processions of monstrous gods and goddesses, these Buddhas and Krishnas, Vishnus and Ramas, these hideous deities with animals' heads and innumerable arms, these dancing women with expressionless faces and strange garments....In his figures the Hindoo artists seems absolutely incapableto reproduce the human form.."

This is ignorant and childish rodomontade is here quoted only because it is typical. Perhaps the easiest way to show its true value would be to ask you to imagine similar words spoken by an Oriental, who should substitute the word "Christian" for the word "Hindu": "Enslaved by the traditions of Christian mythology, interminable processions of crucifixes, and Madonnas" - would not this be an idle criticism of medieval European art?"

(source: [Essays on National Idealism](#) - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p. 83).



An Apsara or heavenly dancer. A fresco from Sittanavasal. Pallava period. 7th century. The supple movement of the figure have been rendered with the ease and sureness of touch borne of close observation and aesthetic insight.

(source: The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest B. Havell p. 68-69)

European reaction to Hindu art was obviously negative. Even today non-European societies are held by the grip of European cultural values. **The indifference in England towards Hindu art was particularly marked. For all its impressive accumulation of information archaeological scholarship had been inadequate for appreciating Indian art .**

This early attitude may not be entirely expected; what is remarkable is that the attitude persisted even into the modern period.

The gods and goddesses were frequently portrayed with multiple arms, which prompted early European travelers to speak of them as 'monstrosities'. Certain writers, speaking of the many-armed images of Indian arts, have treated this peculiarity as an unpardonable defect. "After 300 A.D." says Mr. Vincent Smith, "Indian sculpture properly so-called hardly deserves to be reckoned as art.

In spite of a great deal of contact between India and the West, very little has changed in the last 700 years since the first written accounts of Indian culture appeared in the writings of the travelers to India. The early writers had to resort to **narrow Christian medievalism for their distorted vision of India**, and more recently, to myopic rationalism and pretentious scholarship--all of which have contributed to the total "failure" in the Western interpretation of India. The main problem seems to be that Westerners do not have an appropriate framework to objectively assess and appreciate the pluralistic themes and the rich textures that Indian art and culture represent. **This lack of understanding exposes Western (especially American) superciliousness that continues to plague the Westerners' intolerance for**

other cultures.

(source: [Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art - By Partha Mitter](#)).

The idea connected with sex symbolism in Hindu art and ritual are generally misinterpreted by those who take them out of the environment of Indian social life. In the Upanishads sexual relationship is described as one of the means of apprehending the divine nature, and throughout oriental literature it is constantly used metaphorically to express the true relationship between the human soul and God. The words of Sir Monier-Williams are very applicable to the whole question of sex symbolism in Indian religious art: "In India the relation between the sexes is regarded as a sacred mystery, and is never held to be suggestive of improper or indecent ideas."

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) p.158).

Few aspects of Indian culture are so often, perhaps so willfully misunderstood as this sex-symbolism in art. Sir Monier-Williams, when in referring to the presence of many words of erotic significance in his Sanskrit Dictionary, he says that "in India the relationship between the sexes is regarded as sacred mystery, and is never held to be suggestive of improper or indecent ideas." **As much could hardly be said of Europe.** In such an idealization of life itself there lies the strength of Hinduism, and in its absence the weakness of modern Christianity.

India is wont to suggest the eternal and inexpressible infinites in terms of sensuous beauty. The love of man for woman or for nature are one with his love for God. Nothing is common or unclean. All life is sacrament, no part of it more so than another, and there is no part of it that may not symbolize eternal and infinite things. India draws no distinction between sacred and profane love. All love is a divine mystery; it is the recognition of Unity. Indeed the whole distinction of sacred and profane is for India meaningless, and so it is that the relation of the soul to God may be conceived in terms of the passionate adoration of woman for her lover.

(source: [Essays on National Idealism - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy](#) Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p. 32-33).

Refer to [A Map of Sacred Stories of the Ancient World - Contributed to this site by Dom Sturiale of Sydney, Australia](#). Refer to [The World of Myth - By Ramesh N Rao - sulekha.com](#)).

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Denigration by Marxist historians

According to so called "Eminent Historians" of India " Lord Indra is "rowdy and amoral." The God Krishna has a "rather questionable personal record." Lord Shiva is just "a development of phallic cult." Bhakti is just the reflection of "the complete dependence of the serfs or tenants on the landowners in the context of Indian feudal society." That they should see nothing but questionable conduct in Krishna, that even a foreigner - **Stella Kramrisch - should see such an effulgence in the concept of Shiva and this eminent historian** (refer to [D. N. Jha, Ancient India, An introductory outline](#) p. 18) just the extended phallus, that he should see nothing more in bhakti than a reflection of feudalism - **what telling evidence of the success of Maucaulay, the Missionaries and Marx!**



While our eminent historians try to belittle the achievements of Indian art and architecture in the ancient period - by insinuating that it was derived from other countries, by seeing only a reflection of the life of the privileged classes - Soviet historians talk of the high standards the Indians attained in these spheres. They talk of its high originality. They talk of "the true masterpieces of Indian world of art" as exemplified by the Ajanta caves." So, the gods of the Hindus are "rowdy and amoral," with a "rather questionable personal record," they are just developments of primitive cults - animism, fertility, and the rest, specially the phallic



cult!

(source: [Eminent Historians - By Arun Shourie](#) p. 15 - 193).

At the academic level, Indian Marxists are welcomed in American seminars as privileged commentators on " Hindu communalism." It is ironic as well as disturbing that a movement which still swears by Lenin (whose October 1917 coup d'etat deposed the first democratic Russian Parliament) and Stalin, is **hailed in Western universities as the guardian of a civil polity against the encroaching barbarism of Hindu revivalism."**

Thus, Romila Thapar and R. S. Sharma are quoted at some length as **representatives of Indian Marxist** thought in [A Dictionary of Marxist Thought - By Tom Bottomore](#). Harvard University Press. December 1983. ASIN: 0674205251.

(source: [Decolonising The Hindu Mind - Ideological Development of Hindu Revivalism](#) Rupa & Co. January 2001 ISBN: 8171675190 p. 40-42).

Compare the comments of our Eminent Marxist historians to what other scholars have said about Indian art:

Dr. Ernest Binfield Havell (1861-1934) states: " This Shiva's emblem symbolizes the reproductive power of nature."

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) p. 191).

Art of a Hindu is a manifestation of God as has been aptly pointed out by **Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru** "Art is intimately associated with the Indian religion and philosophy that it is difficult to appreciate it fully unless one has some knowledge of the ideas which govern the Indian mind...for in Indian art there is always religious urge, a looking beyond.."

(source: [Glimpses of Indian Culture - By Dr. Giriraj Shah](#) p. 107-8).

Dr. Karan Singh has called Lord Shiva: "The great primeval lord and a powerful symbol representing the creative force behind all manifestations. The magnificent image of Shiva dancing represents one of the high water marks of Human art. The magnificent monolithic sculpture of Trimurti on the Elephanta island is one of the world's great artistic creations, this massive sculpture shows clearly the three aspects integrated in a single, divine entity."

(source: [Essays on Hinduism - By Karan Singh](#) p. 15-16).

Annie Besant (1847-1933) wrote: "Indian Art is a blossom of the Tree of the Divine Wisdom, full of suggestions from worlds invisible, striving to express the ineffable, and it can never be understood merely by the emotional and the intellectual; only in the light of the Spirit can its inner significance be glimpsed."

(source: [Our Heritage and Its Significance - By Shripad Rama Sharma](#) p.68).

Rizwan Salim has wisely observed:

"From the earliest surviving Gupta period temples of the fifth century to the grand Moghul monuments and Rajput palaces, Hindustan has more than a thousand year old tradition of stunningly beautiful and awe-inspiring architecture. Yet so lacking in cultural pride have Indian architects been, that after 1950 they eagerly adopted the European Leftwing architects' Bauhaus style, the architecture of ugly concrete boxes. Now they slavishly follow the currently fashionable West "Post-Modern" style that developed out of the Bauhaus. There has been no authentic Indian architecture now, structures replicating shapes and forms, motifs and decorative elements of ancient Hindu temple and Moghul and Rajput palace art."

(source: [Need for Cultural pride - Revival - By Rizwan Salim](#) The Hindustan Times 9/20/1998).

Stella Krimrisch: "The mystery of Shiva has left its imprint over the millennia on the resilient matrix of the Indian mind."

(source: [Presence of Shiva - By Stella Krimrisch](#)).



*Brahma. Ceiling slab from a temple at Aihole. C. 7th century A.D.
Prince of Wales Museum. Bombay
(source: The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest B. Havell)*

Jawaharlal Nehru has said:

"It is not some secret doctrine or esoteric knowledge that has kept India vital and going through these long ages, but a tender humanity, a varied and tolerant culture and a deep understanding of life and its mysterious ways. Her abundant vitality flows out from age to age in her magnificent literature and art, though we have only a small part of it with us and much lies hidden or has been destroyed by nature or man's vandalism. The Trimurti in the Elephanta caves might well be the many-faced statue of India itself, powerful, with compelling eyes, full of deep knowledge and understanding, looking down upon us."

(source: [Cultural Heritage of Ancient India - By Sachinder Kumar Maity](#) p. 11).

H. H. Wilson also says: "Whatever may have been the origin of this form of worship in India, the notions upon which it was founded, **according to the impure fancies of European writers**, are not to be traced in even the Saiva Puranas."

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) p. 158).

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has rightfully observed:

"It is impossible to treat of art as an isolated phenomenon apart from the spiritual and physical life of the people who gave it birth. Indian art cannot be understood by those without sympathy for Indian culture; and this is still a rare thing. The orthodox Christian, the materialist, and the Imperialist are all, in so far as they are what these names imply, constitutionally unable to sympathize with the ideals of Indian civilization. Indian art is essentially religious; and those who are entirely ignorant of and hopelessly out of sympathy with Indian religions, as well as **those who in the name of Puritanism would secularize or abolish art entirely, have not in them a capacity of understanding.**"

(source: [Essays on National Idealism - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy](#) Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p.82-83).

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The Master of the Dance - (Nataraja)

Hollier-Larousse, author of [World Mythology](#) has written:

"As destroyer and renewer, Shiva determines the rhythm of the worlds. **Thousands of years before scientists discovered the similarity of structure between the atomic nucleus and the solar systems, the Hindus asserted that the same rhythm must of necessity be found at all stages of creation and in all domains. That is why ideas about rhythm and density - play a role in Hindu thought comparable to that which we associate with weight and shape, which are merely manifestation of them.**

Now what in the eyes of man is the purest manifestation of rhythm, if not dancing? So Shiva is the supreme dancer, the king of dancing Nataraja. And he is frequently depicted as such, in a pose of perfect harmony, in the midst of a vast crown on which myriad sparks alternately flare and die again. Even so worlds appear and disappear. Prostrate beneath his feet, Tripurasura, the demon of the three towns, of the three worlds, obligingly offer to act as his stool. And Shiva makes use of him, for his triple universe is the entire reason for his dance.

Better than any words, the dance could in fact evoke the supreme and perfect rhythm of this dynamic and triumphant joy in which the individual is at one with great 'interplay' of the world (lila). 'He whom no sign could describe is made known to us by his mystic dancing,' says a Sivaist poet from Southern India."

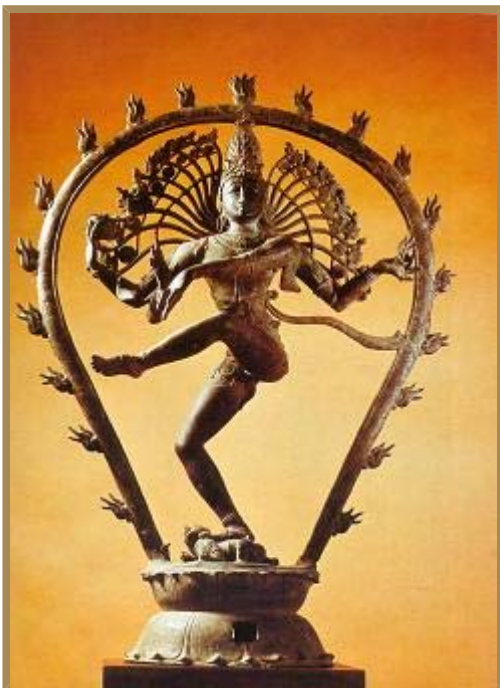
(source: [Larousse World Mythology – Edited by Pierre Grimal](#), Professor at the Sorbonne 1973 p. 223 translated by Patricia Beardsworth from the [Auge, Gillon, Hollier-Larousse, Moreau et Cie, Paris](#)).

E B Havell has described the statue of Shiva Nataraja at the Elephant Caves:

"is a majestic conception and an embodiment of titanic power: "Though the rock itself seems to vibrate with the rhythmic movement of the dance, the noble head bears the same look of serene, calm and dispassion which illuminate the face of the Buddha."

(source: [India's Empire of Mind – By Sudhansu Bimal Mookherji](#) p. 116).

Sharada Srinivasan, a Fellow at National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore writes:



"Fritjof Capra catapulted Nataraja into a modern-day scientific icon when he euphorically stated in his book of 1974 [The Tao of Physics](#) that:

"the dancing Shiva is the dancing universe, the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another".

(for more on Fritjof Capra refer to chapter on [Quotes251-270](#)).

It has been argued that the Nataraja metal icon can be viewed as a human or anthropomorphic representation of dynamic cosmic phenomena. Indeed, texts such as [Naisadhiyacharita](#) poetically describe the scattering of myriad stars in the sky by Shiva's dance and splintering of rocks and crystals of Mount Kailash while the [Vadnagar Prasasti](#) speaks of Shiva playing newly created planets as if they were crystal balls.

A close examination of the symbolism evident in Chidambaram — the temple by the sea coast of Tamil Nadu dedicated to the worship of Nataraja — shows that **the ancient seers' revelations encompass concepts which are at once both**

Chit is consciousness and ambaram refers to the cosmos and a literal translation would be the cosmic consciousness. The shrine to Nataraja at Chidambaram architecturally and conceptually links the cosmic realms and the inner consciousness through Shiva's dance — the anandatandava or dance of bliss — where Shiva is described by the Tamil poet, Umapati of Chidambaram, as sachchidananda; that is, 'being, consciousness and bliss'.

The Chit Sabha or the golden-roofed 'Hall of Consciousness' in the Chidambaram temple is the only shrine where the Nataraja metal icon is worshipped inside the innermost sanctum, the garbhagriha. Instead, inside the Chit Sabha, by the side of the Nataraja bronze, is the enigmatic Chidambara Rahasyam or the secret revelation of Chidambaram, wherein Shiva is worshipped as the formless akasa lingam. It symbolizes the sky, represented, aptly, by a curtained empty space. The curtain represents the aroopa or formless manifestation of Sivakami or Shakti, the primordial feminine energy who inspires and witnesses Shiva's cosmic dance.

This presages an intuitive understanding of concepts such as the wave-particle duality of quantum physics, with matter and energy being sides of the same coin.

The **Tatvaryastava stotra**, a hymn on Nataraja at Chidambaram, describes Shiva as sky-clad and Chidambaram as the sacred spot for the element, sky, where Shiva, as Lord of the universe, is both the universal dancer and the witness of his own dance, who creates and removes maya before finally ensuring emancipation.

Maya, represented by a black curtain behind Nataraja in the Chit Sabha, can be interpreted as a 'measure of reality' with the Mayamata being an ancient text on architectural measurements. Therefore, not only is Shiva's dance cosmic, but Shiva can also be identified with the sentient universe, as well as with the consciousness within, which creates and destroys notions of reality.

These ideas hint at quantum mechanical paradoxes such as observer-created reality inherent to Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. They also bring to mind the ideas of 'quantum consciousness' and 'the infinite brain' theorized by physicist Roger Penrose who strove for a grand unified theory of the forces of the universe encompassing quantum consciousness in his book *The Emperor's New Mind*. **Indeed, the profound concepts symbolized by the Chidambaram temple are a humbling reminder of our sheer insignificance and transience in the gigantic universe that we, so often self-indulgently and haughtily, inhabit.**

(source: [Nataraja Reveals Cosmic Secrets - By Sharada Shrinivasan](#)).

In Shiva's temple, stone pillars make music - an architectural rarity

Shiva is the Destroyer and Lord of Rhythm in the Hindu trinity. But here he is Lord Nellaiyappar, the Protector of Paddy, as the name of the town itself testifies — nel meaning paddy and veli meaning fence in Tamil. Prefixed to nelveli is tiru, which signifies something special — like the exceptional role of the **Lord of Rhythm** or the unique musical stone pillars in the temple. In the **Nellaiyappar** temple, gentle taps on the cluster of columns hewn out of a single piece of rock can produce the keynotes of Indian classical music. **"Hardly anybody knows the intricacies of how these were constructed to resonate a certain frequency. The more aesthetically inclined with some musical knowledge can bring out the rudiments of some rare ragas from these pillars."**

The Nelliyappar temple chronicle, Thirukovil Varalaaru, says the nadaththai ezhuppum kal thoongal — **stone pillars that produce music — were set in place in the 7th century during the reign of Pandyan king Nindraser Nedumaran**. Archaeologists date the temple before 7th century and say it was built by successive rulers of the Pandyan dynasty that ruled over the southern parts of Tamil Nadu from Madurai. Tirunelveli, about 150 km south of Madurai, served as their subsidiary capital.

Each huge musical pillar carved from one piece of rock comprises a cluster of smaller columns and stands testimony to a unique understanding of the "physics and mathematics of sound." Well-known music researcher and scholar Prof. Sambamurthy Shastry, the **"marvellous musical stone pillars" are "without a parallel" in any other part of the country. "What is unique about the musical stone pillars in the Tirunelveli Nellaiyappar temple is the fact you have a cluster as large as 48 musical pillars carved from one piece of stone, a delight to both the ears and the eyes,"** The pillars at the Nellaiyappar temple are a combination of the Shruti and Laya types.

This is an architectural rarity and a sublime beauty to be cherished and preserved.

(source: [In Shiva's temple, pillars make music](#) - telegraphindia.com).

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Sri Aurobindo and Indian Art

According to **Sri Aurobindo**: "A good deal of hostile or unsympathetic western criticism of Indian civilization has been directed in the past against its aesthetic side and taken the form of a disdainful or violent depreciation of its fine arts, architecture, sculpture and painting. The Indian mind in its natural poise finds it almost or quite as difficult really, that is to say, spiritually to understand the arts of Europe, as the ordinary European mind to enter into the spirit of Indian painting and sculpture. For the Indian mind form does not exist except as a creation of the spirit and draws all its meaning and value from the spirit. This characteristic attitude of the Indian reflective and creative mind necessitates in our view of its creations an effort to get beyond at once to the inner spirit of reality it expresses and see from it and not from outside.

A great oriental work of art does not easily reveal its secret to one who comes to it solely in a mood of aesthetic curiosity or...still less as the cultivated and interested tourist passing among strange and foreign things; but it has to be seen in loneliness, in the solitude of one's self...a sense which modern Europe with her assault of crowded art galleries and over-pictured walls seems to have quite lost.. - have put their temples and their Buddhas as often as possible away on mountains and in distant or secluded scenes of Nature and avoid living with great paintings in the crude hours of daily life.



Indian architecture especially demands this kind of inner study and this spiritual self-identification with its deepest meaning and will not otherwise reveal itself to us. The secular buildings of ancient India, her palaces and places of assembly and civic edifices have not outlived the ravage of time; what remains to us is mostly something of the great mountain and cave temples, something too of the temples of her ancient cities of the plains, and for the rest we have the fanes and shrines of her later times, whether situated in temple cities and places of pilgrimage like Srirangam and Rameshwaram or in her great once regal towns like Madura, when the temple was the center of life. It is then the most hieratic side of a hieratic art that remains to us. These sacred buildings are the signs, the architectural self-expression of an ancient spiritual and religious culture.

Indian sacred architecture of whatever date, style or dedication goes back to something timelessly ancient and now outside India almost wholly lost, something which belongs to the past, and yet it goes forward too, though this the rationalistic mind will not easily admit it, to something which will return upon us and is already beginning to return, something which belongs to the future. An Indian temple, to whatever godhead it may be built is in its utmost reality an altar raised to the divine Self, a house of the Cosmic Spirit, an appeal and aspiration to the Infinite.

Indian sacred architecture constantly represents the greatest oneness of the Self, the cosmic, the infinite in the immensity of its world-design, the multitude of its features of self-expression, laksana, (yet the oneness is greater than and independent of their totality and in itself indefinable), and all its starting-point of unity in conception, its mass of design and immensity of material, its crowding abundance of significant ornament and detail and its return towards oneness are only intelligible as necessary circumstances of this poem, this epic or this lyric - for there are smaller structures which are such lyrics - of the Infinite.

The western mentality, except in those who are coming or returning, since Europe had once something of this cult in her own way, to this vision, may find it difficult to appreciate the truth and meaning of such an

art, which tries to figure existence as a whole and not in its pieces; **but I would invite those Indian minds who are troubled by these criticisms or partly or temporarily overpowered by the western way of seeing things, to look at our architecture in the light of this conception and see whether all but minor objections do not vanish as soon as the real meaning makes itself felt and gives body to the first indefinable impression and emotion which we experience before the greater constructions of the Indian builders.** The Indian vision of the world and existence was vaster fuller than Shakespeare's, because it embraced not merely life, but all being, not merely humanity, but all the worlds and all Nature and cosmos.

Terror and gloom are conspicuously absent from the feelings aroused in it by religion, art or literature. The very goddess of destruction is at the same time the compassionate and loving Mother; the austere Maheshwara, Rudra is also Shiva, the auspicious, Ashutosha, the refuge of men. The Indian thinking and religious mind looks with calm, without shrinking or repulsion, with an understanding born of its age long effort at identity and oneness, at all that meets it in the stupendous spectacle of the cosmos. And even its asceticism, its turning from the world, which begins not in terror and gloom, but in a sense of vanity and fatigue, or of something higher, truer, happier than life, soon passes beyond any element of pessimistic sadness into the rapture of the eternal peace and bliss.

Mark the curious misreading of the dance of Shiva as a dance of Death or Destruction, whereas, as anybody ought to be able to see who looks upon the Nataraja, it expresses on the contrary the rapture of the cosmic dance with the profundities behind of the unmoved eternal and infinite bliss. **So too the figure of Kali which is so terrible to European eyes is, as we know, the Mother of the universe accepting this fierce aspect of destruction in order to slay the Asuras, the powers of evil in man and the world.** There are other strands in this feeling in the western mind which seem to spring from a dislike of anything uplifted far beyond the human measure and others again in which we see a subtle survival of the Greek limitation..."

(source: [The Foundations of Indian Culture - By Sri Aurobindo](#) p. 196-213).

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Ideals of Indian Art - excerpts **By Ernest Binfield Havell**

It is prima facie incredible that a highly developed civilization, spreading over thousands of years and over a vast area like India, which has produced a splendid literature and expressed lofty ideals in building materials, should have lacked the capacity, or found no occasion, for giving them expression in sculpture and painting. Nevertheless, this was the general opinion of European savants and art critics.

Sir George Birchwood, author of the official handbook to the Indian section of the Victoria and Albert Museum, ridiculed the Indian artist's divine ideal. He and other Victorian critics, held that "the unfettered and impassioned realization of the ideals kindled within us by the things without us" was beyond the capacity of the Indian craftsman. Indian art to him meant no more than a pretty chintz, a rich brocade, or gorgeous carpet, fantastic carving, or curious inlay; and an ancient architecture fascinating to the archaeologist and tourist with its reminiscences of bygone pomp and splendor, but an extinct art useless for the needs and ideals of our prosaic and practical times.

Viewed from the secularist and pseudo-scientific angle, Indian art will always be unattractive and incomprehensible. But the Indian artist is not really blind to the beauties of Nature. He can be realistic in the European sense, though realism for him has a different meaning to that which we attach to it, for the philosophy which inspires him regards all that we see in nature as transitory, illusive phenomena, and declares that the only Reality is the Divine Essence or Spirit. Thus while modern European art hardly concerns itself with the Unseen, but limits its mental range to the realm of Nature and thus retains, even in its highest flights, the sense and form of its earthly environment, Indian art is always striving to realize something of the universal, the eternal, and the infinite.

European art, since the so-called Renaissance, has, as it were, its wings clipped: it knows only the beauty of earthy things. Indian art, soaring into the highest empyrean, is ever trying to bring down something of the beauty of the things above.

The Indian artist had an entirely different starting point. He considered that the perfect human animal was an inadequate symbol for the beauty of the divine nature which comprehended all human qualities and transcended them all. It was only by meditating on the Ultimate Perfection that the artist's mind could perceive some glimmer of the beauty of the Godhead. **Mere bodily strength and mundane perfections of form are never glorified in Indian art. Indian art is essentially idealistic, mystic, symbolic, and transcendental. The artist is both priest and poet.** In this respect Indian art is closely allied to the Gothic art of Europe – indeed, Gothic art is only the Eastern consciousness manifesting itself in a Western environment. But while the Christian art of the Middle Ages is always emotional, rendering literally the pain of the mortification of the flesh, the bodily sufferings of the Man of Sorrows, Indian art appeals more to the imagination and strives to realize the spirituality and abstraction of a supra-terrestrial sphere.

Indian mysticism has its philosophic system, the Yoga-sastra; Yoga was not and is not practiced merely as a spiritual exercise leading to the beatific vision. It claims to be a psychological process of drawing into oneself the dynamics or the logos which controls the universe and to be adaptable for all kinds of mental and physical activity. It inspired the artist, poet, and musician as well as the mystic who sought spiritual enlightenment. It gave the craftsman his creative skill and the soldier perfect control over his weapons, the statesman his far-seeing vision, the seer and inspired thinker his super-natural powers.



Ramayana relief, Prambanam, Indonesia
(source: *The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest B. Havell p. 60-65*).

In all Indian poetry, art, and mythology, the sublime nature of the Himalayas has always been regarded as a special revelation of divine beauty and as a fitting shrine for all the gods. On Mt. Kailasa, the temple's glorious pinnacle, sits the Divine Thinker in His icy cell, controlling the Universe by the power of Yoga. Here Vyasa, says the Mahabharata, taught the Vedas to his disciples. Here is the heavenly staircase by which Buddha and many other avatars descended to be born on earth, and here the heavenly Ganges falls in seven torrents over the mountain's crest. The sacred lake, Manasarovara, (the most excellent Lake of the Mind) fed by Kailasa's snows, is the legendary source of the four world-rivers which water the four great continents, or the four petals of the World Lotus, another pregnant symbol in Indian art. The wild geese (hamsas) which drift thither with the monsoon winds, are to the pious Hindu symbols of the human soul wringing its way to its heavenly resting-place.

Indian artist for many centuries shrank from the thought of depicting for the common crowd the Yogi's vision of the Divine Form : like the secret lore of the Vedas it was a sacred mystery revealed to none but the elect. From the seaports of her eastern and western coasts streams of Indian colonists and

craftsmen, poured all over Southern Asia, Lanka, Burma, Siam, Sumatra, Java, and far-distant Cambodia. Through China and Korea, Indian art entered Japan about the middle of the sixth century.

Hindu iconographic art, like modern cubism, joins mathematics with aesthetics. In the yantra it shows the impersonal form of the Godhead developing mathematically from a central point. (Bindu). **Hindu philosophy thus clearly recognizes the impossibility of human art realizing the form of God. It therefore creates in Indian painting and sculpture a symbolical representation of those, milder, humanized, but still superhuman, divine appearances which mortal eyes can bear to look upon.** A figure with three heads and four, six or eight arms seems to a European barbaric conception, though it is not less physiologically impossible than the wings growing from the human scapula in the European representation of angels – an idea probably borrowed from the East. But it is altogether foolish to condemn such artistic allegories a priori, because they many not conform to the canons of the classic art of Europe. **All art is suggestion and convention, and if Indian artists by their conventions can suggest divine attributes to Indian people with Indian culture, they have fulfilled the purpose of their art.** It is the unfortunate tendency of modern European education to reduce art to mere rules of logic or technique anatomy or perspective, style or fashion, so that the creative faculty on which the vitality of art depends is drowned in empty formularies of no intellectual, moral, or aesthetic values.



*Dancing Ganesha from Halebid, Mysore
(source: The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest B. Havell p. 148-149).*

In the cave-temples of Elephanta, Ellora, and Ajanta Indian sculptors played with chiaroscuro in great masses of living rock with the same feeling as the Gothic cathedral builders, or as Wagner played with tonal effects, hewing out a colossal scale the grander contrasts of light and shade to give a fitting atmosphere of mystery and awe to the paintings and sculpture, which told the endless legends of the Buddha or the fantastic myth of the Hindu Valhalla.

Art will always be caviere to the vulgar, but those who really learn and understand it should begin with Indian art, for true Indian art is pure art stripped of the superfluities and vulgarities which delight the uneducated eye. Yet Indian art, being more subtle and recondite than the classic art of Europe, require a higher degree of artistic understanding, and it rarely appeals to European dilettanti who, with a smattering of perspective, anatomy, rules of proportion and design, aspire to be art critics, amateur painters, sculptors, or architects, and these, unfortunately, have had the principal voice in deciding administrative questions which vitally affect India's artistic life. So the question whether Indian art is still a vital force, revealing India's spiritual self, seems to be less important than the question of taste – or whether from the European standpoint India's spiritual self should be allowed to reveal itself in art which the European and the Anglicized Indian do not appreciate or understand.

Europe of the present day has far more to learn from India in art than to teach. Religious art in Europe is altogether lost: it perished in our so-called Renaissance. In India, the true spirit of it still lives.

Bhakti is the moving spirit of all great religious art, in the West as well as the East. It is bhakti that keeps Indian art alive: it is the lack of it which makes modern Western art so lifeless. Anglo-Indians have always ascribed the artistic triumphs of the Indian Moghul dynasty to the superior aesthetic genius of Islam; but this is quite untrue reading of Indian art-history. The art of Fatehpur-Sikhri and of Jahangir's great palace at Agra are essentially Hindu art. **Abul Fazal**, writing with full appreciation of contemporary painting, says of the Hindus: "Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them." Even in the Taj Mahal, the typical masterpiece of what we call Moghul art, many of the principal craftsmen were Hindus, or of Hindu descent; and how much Persian art owed to the frequent importation of Indian artists and craftsmen is never understood by European art-critics.

All the great monuments of Saracenic art in India surpass those of Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, and Spain, in the exact measure by which they are indebted to Hindu craftsmanship and inspired by Hindu idealism.

The inspiration of the Taj Mahal came not from its Muslim builders; it was the spirit of India which came upon it and breathed into it the breath of life.

Saracenic art flourished in India just as long as the Moghul emperors were wise enough to observe perfect impartiality between Muslims and Hindus. When the bigot Aurangzeb expelled all the Hindu artists and craftsmen whom his father and grandfather had attracted to the service of the state, the art of Moghuls in India was struck with a blight from which it never recovered.

Every national art is an expression of national character and when we compare the devout and reverent outlook upon Nature shown in these sculptures with utter vulgarity of modern India...India, vulgarized by modern education and by the sordid ideals of modern commercialism, will never compensate humanity for the passing of India with its love of beauty – the perfect law of Nature, in which science and art are one.

But my main objective is to help educated Indians to a better understanding of their own national art, and **to give them that faith and pride in it** without which the wisest measures that any Government could devise will always be thrown away. Even if, for Europeans who think like Macaulay, all Indian art should be worthless, it will always remain a priceless boon to Indians, offering them something which the best European art can never give them. **Let Indians of the present generation, who through Macaulay's narrow and short-sighted policy have never enjoyed this precious heritage, see that their children are put in possession of it.**

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#)).

Refer to [A Map of Sacred Stories of the Ancient World](#) - Contributed to this site by Dom Sturiale of

Sydney, Australia. Refer to [The World of Myth - By Ramesh N Rao - sulekha.com](#)).

Havell saw Islamic architecture as one of rapid capitulation to the superior indigenous art of India.

Akbar was not the exception but the classic example. His wholesale adoption of Hindu styles and his patronage of Indian craftsmen marked the end of a brief experiment with non-Indian forms (Tughluk's tomb for example), and the beginning of one of the greatest periods of purely Indian building. Taking the bull firmly by the horns, Havell turned to the classical age of Moghul architecture, the reign of Shah Jehan (1628-58), and in particular to none other than the Taj Mahal. His first point was that whatever its inspiration, **'there is one thing which has struck every writer about the Taj Mahal and that is its dissimilarity to any other monument in any other part of the world.'** Outside India there was Humayun's tomb in Delhi, or the other two white marble tombs, those of Itimad-ud-Daula in Agra and Salim Chishti at Fatehpur Sikri, were so inferior as to be unworthy of comparison. **There was no precedent in the strictly non-representational art of Islam.** If the inspiration for the building was to be sought in sculpture rather than architecture, then it must be sought in Indian sculpture. **The purity of line and subtlety of contour which characterized it were precisely the qualities that distinguished the Mathura Buddhas or the Khajuraho apsaras.** The hint of effeminacy in the Taj Mahal could only have been done by an Indian artist with his purely conceptual approach that was so blatantly seductive. **Besides, the records showed that the inlay artists employed on the Taj were all Hindus.**

Havell had studied the **silpa-sastras** – the traditional manuals of the Hindu builder – and he believed that even the bulbous dome conformed more closely to Indian ideals than those of Samarkand. There was even a sculptural representation of such a dome in one of the Ajanta cave temples. Moreover, the internal roofing arrangement of four dome grouped round the fifth, central dome conformed exactly to the 'panch-ratna', the five jewel system so common to Indian buildings of all sorts.

(source: [India Discovered - By John Keay](#) p125-129).

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Painting

Vincent A. Smith in [History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon](#) says: "The remarkable success attained by Hindu Art, both plastic and pictorial, in the treatment of plant motives and the representation of indigenous animals is unsurpassed."

Ernest Binfield Havell says: "Among Rembrandt's pen and ink studies collected in the British Museum, the Louvre, and elsewhere, a number have been identified as copies or adaptations of **India miniatures**, and it has been shown that from them chiefly, Rambrandt derived the Oriental atmosphere for his Biblical subjects!"

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy said of miniature paintings in general that they conjure a magic world in which the men are always heroic and the women always beautiful.

In classical Sanskrit literature painting is considered an occupation not unworthy of princes. It is evident from early Sanskrit records that painting was closely associated with popular festivals and with civic life in ancient India. There are many allusions to them in Sanskrit literature. The Ramayana describes Ravana's palace in Lanka, where

Gay, blooming creepers clothed the walls,
Green bowers were there and picture-halls,
And chambers made for soft delight.

A **chitra-sala**, or gallery of mural paintings, was an indispensable annex to a Hindu palace until quite modern times, or until Indian art fell into disrepute and it became fashionable for Indian princes to import inferior European oil-paintings and European furniture. These chitra-salas were quadrangular cloisters surrounding one of the palace gardens or pavilions, sometimes reserved for public resort.

(source: [The Art Heritage of India - By Ernest Binfield Havel](#) p.65-66).

Paintings are easily destroyed by natural causes or deliberate injuries; and what remains of Indian painting cannot be the hundredth or even the thousandth part of what once existed. We cannot, however, doubt that the art was continuously practiced from pre-Buddhist times to the present day. The paintings of Ajanta though much damaged, still form the greatest extant monument of ancient painting and the only school except Egyptian in which a dark-skinned race is taken as the normal type. They belong to the same courtly religious culture as that which finds expression in the works of Kalidasa, and show the same deep understanding of the hearts of men and women and animals that has given to Shakuntala her immortality.

(source: [Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon - By Ananda K. Coomaraswamy](#) p.).



Krishna and Radha under a Tree in a Storm
artist unknown. 1750-1825 - The Brooklyn Museum

Abdul Faza, the Mohammedan historian, wrote of Hindu painters: "Their pictures surpass our conception of things. Few indeed in the whole world are found equal to them." (source: Blochman's Aini i Akberi. Volume I p. 108)

Writing on the technique of the Ajanta paintings, Mr. Griffiths, who superintended the copying of them by his students in the Bombay School of Art, says truly:

"The artist who painted them were giants in execution. Even on the vertical sides of walls, some of the lines, which were drawn with one sweep of the brush, stuck me as being very wonderful; but when I saw long, delicate curves drawn without faltering, with equal precision, upon the horizontal surface of a ceiling where the difficulty of execution is increased a thousand fold it appeared to me nothing less than miraculous!" "The Chinese Schools owe their inspiration originally to the art of India. In the early centuries of the Christian era the traditions of Indian religious art had been taken into Turkistan and China by Indian

Buddhist missionaries and craftsmen, and by Chinese students taught in Indian Universities."

(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London. p. 185).

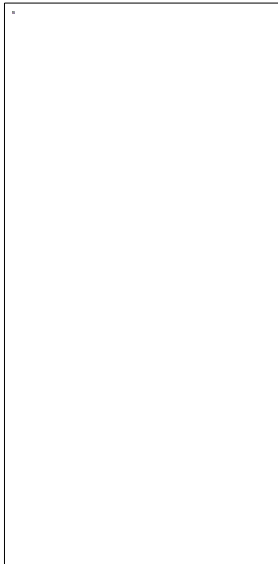
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Conclusion

The Western artists see nature with his eyes and judges art by intellectual and aesthetic standards. **The Indian seeks truth in his inner consciousness, and judges of its expression by metaphysical and imaginative standards. Art for him is not to please, but to manifest."**

(source: [Essays on National Idealism - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy](#) Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981 p. 87).

Art in India has always been considered a path of realization of the Ultimate Reality. It is spiritual in outlook, idealistic in expression and sublime in interpretation.



It is not merely a matter of sensuous enjoyment, not a luxury to be enjoyed by the leisured rich class of people or state rulers, not something to amuse oneself with. It has a deeper basis and a more exalted aim. It was considered to be as vital for human progress as Devotion or Knowledge of Love. God was considered to be the fountain of all Beauty as He was considered to be the source of all Knowledge, Power and Wisdom. God as Absolute Beauty is one of the basic ideas of Ancient Hindu Culture. **Rukhmini addresses Lord Krishna as Bhuvana Sundara (the most beautiful in the universe), Madhusoodana Saraswati, the great advaitic scholar, describes Shri Krishna as Soundaryasarasvaswa (the entire essence of Beauty). But for His Beauty how can there be anything beautiful in creation?**

In ancient India Art went hand in hand with Religion. In one sense we may say, Art turned inward is Religion and religion turned outward is Art. Temples have been repositories of all arts; they have enshrined not only idols of deities but art treasures as well.

The Indian imager approached his work with great solemnity, invoking the god whom he would represent. In the Agni Purana, he is told, the night before undertaking a great work, to pray: "O thou Lord of all gods, teach me in dreams how to carry out all the work I have in my mind."

The artist tries to bring Godhead nearer to us by working along the line of the Beauty aspect of God. Man is a miniature God, he has in himself potentially all the Divine faculties. He may have only a little knowledge now, but he will become a great knower in due course. So art is verily a path to the Supreme; it is a Yoga, Soundarya Yoga, so to say. Artists are, at any rate ought to be, great yogis in their own way. Great Rishis and devas have been great artists; the authorship of some of our art traditions is traced to great sages. The very names given to some of the Deities show how much emphasis was laid upon this aspect of Art. Nataraja is the arch-dancer, Ranganatha means the stage manager. All art expressions in India have a spiritual background. **Unlike the narcissistic and eccentric modern artists, Indian art is not made by a named artist, but by the artist, incarnated in numerous nameless individual.**

Huston Smith has said: "In Hinduism, art is religion, religion is art. To inform and transform us – what we might truly be.

No figure in all art is better loved than this dancing Shiva – lord of dances – the cosmos is his theatre – he dances ceaselessly in twirling stars, circling seasons – the rhythm of the human heart timelessly, effortlessly – his rhythms gather time and timelessness. India was addicted to sculpture – perhaps because it tokens to timelessness and eternity – chiseled in rock we are presented with the relief map of the world as it would have eyes to see its mystery and promise. The invisible reality to which art points to. **Indians saw no point in carving replicas that we usually see ordinary, pedestrian, prosaic, art's**

opportunity is to see deeper than we usually do – to see the infinite stirring in things, warming to bust their buds – so everything in these shapes in. The images are ones awakened and for our awakening – we who are still asleep – to understand is to be reborn."

(source: [The Mystic's Journey - India and the Infinite: The Soul of a People – By Huston Smith](#)).

Ananda K. Coomraswamy thinks:

"The Greek sees the aim of art as the faithful reproduction of nature; but it failed in the greatest qualities because the religion expressed in it was in no sense transcendental. The great cat-gods of Egypt, the sublime Buddhas of Java, the four-handed gods of India, even the great Chinese dragon, are greater imaginative art, belong more in the divine in man, than do the Hermes of Praxiteles or the Venus of Milo."

Indian architecture shows the combination of massiveness and soaring upwardness which is the soul of Indian Art in general. Indian sculpture and ichnography depend on Yogic vision and not on mere artistic manipulation. Thus Hindu art is best expressed as "Emotion recollected in tranquility." It excels in idealism, creativeness, suggestiveness, and evocation of emotion. It is born in bliss and expresses itself in bliss and enkindles bliss.

In the chapter on the "Inspiration of Indian Art" in his great work "Indian Sculpture and Painting,": Mr. Havell, after describing the spiritual character of the Hindus, and the meaning they understood of the winds which swept through the forest trees, the waters which poured down from the Heaven-built Himalayas, the power and beauty of the rising and the setting sun, the radiant light and heat of midday, the glories of the Eastern moonlit nights, the majestic gathering of the monsoon clouds, the fury of the cyclone, the lightning flash and thunder and the cheerful dripping of the life-giving rain, says:

"From this devout communion with nature in all the marvelous diversity of her tropical moods, came the inspiration of an art possessing richness of imagery and wealth of elaboration which seem bewildering and annoying to our dull Northern ways of thinking."

Comparing the European and Hindu art, **E. B. Havell** says:

"European art has, as it were its wings clipped: it knows only the beauty of earthly things. Indian art, soaring into the highest empyrean, is ever trying to bring down to earth something of the beauty of the things above."

(source: [Indian Sculpture and Painting - By Ernest Binfield Havell](#) Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London. p.24 - 69).

Speaking in 1908 of the influence of Indian Art on the art of Europe and Asia, Mr. **E. B. Havell** says:

"In the early centuries of the Christian era, and from this Indian source, came the inspiration of the great school of Chinese painting, which from the seventh to the thirteenth centuries stood first in the whole world...The influence of India's artistic culture can be clearly traced, not only in Byzantine Art, but in the Gothic cathedrals of the middle Ages. Europe is very apt to dwell upon the influence of Western Art and Culture upon Asiatic thought, religion and culture upon the Art and Civilization of Europe is rarely appraised at its proper value...From the seaports of her Western and Eastern coasts, India at this time sent streams of colonists, missionaries and craftsmen all over Southern Asia, Ceylon, Siam and far-distant Cambodia. Through China and Korea, Indian Art entered Japan about the middle of the sixth century. About A.D. 603 Indian colonists from Gujarat brought Indian Art into Java, and at Borobudur, in the 8th and 9th centuries Indian Sculpture achieved its greatest triumphs. **Some day when European Art criticism has widened its present narrow horizon, and learnt the foolishness of using the art standards of Greece and Italy as a tape wherewith to measure and appraise the communings of Asia with the Universal and the Infinite, it will grant the nameless sculptors of India an honorable place among the greatest artists the world have ever known."**

"Europe of the present day has in art far more to learn from India than to teach!"

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Books used for this chapter:

1. [Cultural Heritage of Ancient India](#) - By Sachinder Kumar Maity
 2. [Indian Sculpture and Painting](#) - By Ernest Binfield Havell Elibron Classics reprint. Paperback. New. Based on 1908 edition by John Murray, London.
 3. [Story of Civilization: Our Oriental Heritage](#) - By Will Durant
 4. [Eminent Historians](#) - By Arun Shourie
 5. [The Indian Empire](#) - By Sir William Wilson Hunter
 6. [Civilizations of the East](#) - By Rene Grousset
 7. [Much Maligned Monsters: A History of European Reactions to Indian Art](#) - By Partha Mitter
 8. [The Foundations of Indian Culture](#) - By Sri Aurobindo
 9. [Facets of Indian Culture](#) - By R. Srinivasan Publisher: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan
 10. [Essays on National Idealism](#) - By Ananda K. Coomraswamy Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.1981
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Did you Know?

Hindu Gods in Japan

Hinduism went from India to Japan. Numerous deities were introduced into Japan by Buddhist missionaries and many of these are still very popular. Of Hindu origin, Bensaiten is a goddess of love, the equivalent of the Shinto goddess, Benten. She rides a dragon and, like Benten, plays a biwa (a string instrument).

Benzai-ten to give her complete name **originally personified the waters of the Indian river, Saraswati**, which murmured so melodiously that it was thought to evoke the accents of speech or music was introduced into Japan with Buddhism and associated with the arts and music. She has been credited with the power to grant long life, eloquence, wisdom and military victory, as well as provide protection from natural disaster. The goddess of music, she holds a lute called a biwa and is often depicted with coils of snakes.

Bishomon-ten, god of war comes from the Hindu pantheon. He is portrayed as a soldier who carries a lance and a miniature pagoda.

(source: [Illustrated Dictionary of Mythology](#) - By Philip Wilkinson p. 52). A sea-serpent, worshipped by sailors is called Ryujin, a Chinese equivalent of the Indian Naga or Snake God. According to author Donald A. Mackenzie: "**The Indian form of myth of the Churning of the Milky Ocean reached Japan.**" The Japanese Shinto myth of creation is similar, with the churning of primeval waters until they curdle and form land. It has also been found that some of the scriptures of the Japanese priests preserved in the Horyuji Temple of Japan are written in Bengali characters of the eleventh century.



Bishamon-ten or to give him his full title, Bishamontenno, who also goes by the name of Tamon-tenno (the god-king Vaisramana), was in India cosmology one of the four guardians destined to protect the four quarters of the world from the top of a huge mountain placed at the center of the world like an axis.

(source: [Larousse World Mythology](#) – Edited By **Pierre Grimal**, Professor at the Sorbonne 1973 p. 324-326). translated by Patricia Beardsworth from the Auge, Gillon, Hollier-Larousse, Moreau et Cie, Paris).

Daikokuten - **Shiva** (the god Mahakala) the



Great Black One, is another extremely popular deity of happiness and wealth. He is a combination of the Indian god Mahakala and the

Shinto kami (god) Ohkuni-nushi.

Images of **Ganesha** and **Vishnu** have been found throughout Japan. Numerous Buddhist deities were introduced into Japan and many of these are still very popular. A popular temple at Futako Tamagawa, Tokyo, Japan, displays Ganesha far more prominently than Buddha.

Ganesha is worshipped as [Sho-ten or Shoden](#) (literally, holy god) in many Buddhist temples, and is believed to confer happiness upon his devotees. Shoten, or more fully Daisho-kangiten, is a 'double-bodied' esoteric form of the elephant-headed god known in India as Vinayak or Ganesa. Vinayaka (Binayaka in Japan) literally means "He who overcomes". He was brought to Japan in the ninth century by the founder of the Shingon sect. Shortly afterwards the Tendai sect in turn adopted it as one of their practices.

For example, **Indra**, originally, the god of thunder but now also the king of gods, is popular in Japan as Taiskatu (literally the great King Sakra).

Even Shinto adopted Indian gods, despite its desperate efforts after the Meiji Revolution to disengage itself from Buddhism. The Indian sea god **Varuna**, is worshipped in Tokyo as Sui-ten (water-god). At the Kotohira shrine on the island of Shikoku, sailors worship a god called [Kompera](#), which is a corruption of the Sanskrit word for crocodile, Kumbhira. The divine architect mentioned in the Rig Veda, Vishvakarma, who designed and constructed the world, was regarded in ancient Japan as the god of carpenters, Bishukatsuma. The Indian **Yama**, the god of death, is the most dreaded god of Japan, under the name of [Emma-o](#), the king of hell. Marishi-ten (the goddess - or, less frequently, the god - Marici) in Indian legend an embodiment of the ray of light that appears in the sky before the sun.

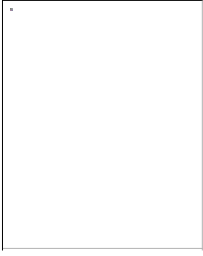
(source: [India and World Civilization - By D. P. Singhal](#) Pan Macmillan Limited. 1993. Pg 80-98).and [Myths of Pre-Columbian America - By Donald A. Mackenzie](#) publisher Senate January 1, 1996 ASIN: 185958490X p.190-191). For more refer to chapter on [India and China](#)

An exhibition called "**Gods Derived From India to Japan**" is showing at the [Okura Shukokan Museum of Fine Arts](#) until May 26. The story behind the showing is a fascinating one. This special event will showcase the 1,400-year-old heritage handed down from India to Japan in a 350-piece display of statues and paintings of Indian household gods and goddesses. Assembled from museum founder Kihachiro Okura's prewar collection and portions of the Yamauchi Collection, which was donated to the museum in the summer of 2000, this exhibition offers a unique opportunity to examine the profound relationship between two ancient cultures. Yamanouchi has identified Benzaiten, the Japanese goddess of good fortune, with Saraswati; Seiten with Ganesha; and Emma, with Yama.

Please visit the museum site: http://www.okura.com/events/article_70.html).

Refer to [A Map of Sacred Stories of the Ancient World - Contributed to this site by Dom Sturiale of Sydney, Australia](#). Refer to [The World of Myth - By Ramesh N Rao - sulekha.com](#)).

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