

Art of India

India is a land of opposites. It is a country of snow-capped peaks and tropical lowlands, of parched deserts and rain-soaked valleys.

Yet, for all its differences, India is a land joined by the strong religious beliefs of its people. These beliefs have in large measure shaped Indian art since the dawn of civilization. In this lesson you will learn about the religion and art of India.

THE RELIGIONS OF INDIA

Indian culture has long been guided by two religions. One of these, Buddhism, you read about in Chapter 5. The other, and older, of India's religions, Hinduism (**hin-doo-iz-uhm**), has its roots in prehistoric times. It was as an outgrowth of Hinduism that Buddhism emerged around 500 B.C.

Unlike Buddhism, Hinduism is not based on the teachings of a single leader. Rather, it is the collected ideas and beliefs of many peoples and cultures over thousands of years. A key belief of Hinduism is that the individual can come to know the powers of the universe

through worship. Another is that the soul never dies. Instead, it is reincarnated (ree-uhn-kahr-nayt-uhd), or reborn, into a lower or higher life form depending on a person's behavior during his or her previous life.

Hinduism and Buddhism — sometimes together, sometimes separately — have influenced Indian art over the last 2500 years.

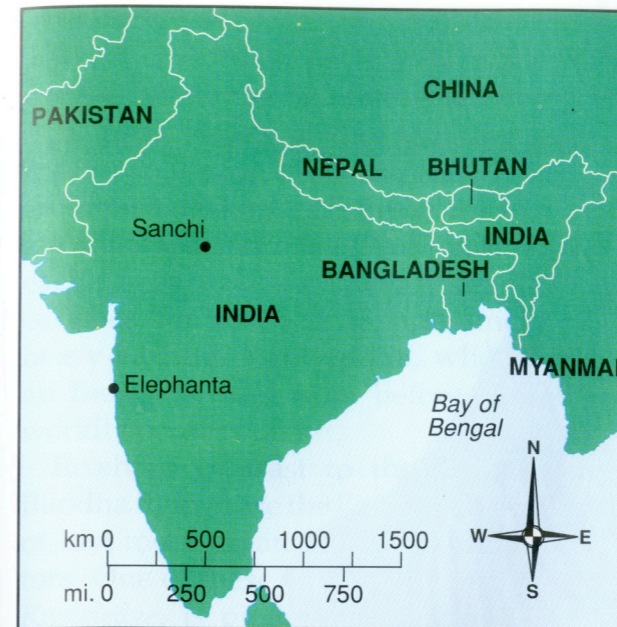
Architecture

Among the earliest, and most important, examples of modern Indian architecture are **stupas (stooop-uhs)**, which are *beehive-shaped domed places of worship*. These were built by Buddhist architects to honor their religion's founder and other important leaders. Each stupa was reached through four gates covered with relief sculptures. Figure 8-1 shows the Great Stupa at Sanchi (san-chee). Find Sanchi on the map in Figure 8-2. Completed before A.D. 1, this impressive structure rises to 50 feet (15 m) at its highest point. Notice the contrast between the dome's smooth surface and the detailed carvings of the gate.



► Figure 8-1 Believers would pass through one of the gates, then slowly walk around the dome. All the while they would meditate. Do you recall what meditation is?

The Great Stupa. c. A.D. 1. Sanchi, India.



▲ Figure 8-2 India.



▲ Figure 8-3 On entering the hall, visitors would come upon three gigantic heads. Standing for important Hindu religious figures, these heads were each nearly 14 feet (4 m) high.

Rock Cut Temple, India.

No less impressive were the great temples Hindu architects created some 600 years later. One of the most striking facts about these temples is how some of them were built. They were cut directly into solid natural rock formations.

Figure 8-3 shows an important achievement of Hindu temple building. This amazing structure was cut from a hilltop by many craftspeople. Its hall, almost 100 feet (30 m) square, is decorated with deeply carved religious panels. Yet, like other early Hindu temples, it was made to be viewed mainly from the outside. To the Hindus, a temple was as much sculpture as it was architecture.



▲ **Figure 8-4** Some of the Buddhas created during this period had an unmistakably Greek look. This was the result of a conquest of parts of India in 327 B.C. by Alexander the Great, a powerful general who admired Greek art.

Gautama Buddha in Contemplation. India, Gandharan. 1st-3rd Century A.D. Black schist. 73 cm (28¾"). Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut. Anonymous gift through Alfred R. Bellinger.

Sculpture

Many sculptures, such as the work in Figure 8-4, show the Buddha seated in meditation. Look closely at this sculpture. Notice the dot on the forehead, the seated pose, and the unusually long earlobes of the figure. All are standard features of the Buddha image, each having its own special meaning. The earlobes, for instance, are a reminder of the heavy earrings the Buddha, who was born an Indian prince, wore before he gave up worldly possessions.

In sharp contrast to the weighty stone Buddha figures are the light, open sculptures of cast metal created later by Hindu sculptors. One of these works, the *Tree of Life and Knowledge*, is pictured in Figure 8-5. This sculpture expresses the Hindu belief in the creative force of the universe. Many animals were sacred to the Hindus, especially the cow. Can you find the cows in this work? What other creatures and birds do you notice? What kind of balance has the sculptor used?



◀ **Figure 8-5** The “tree of life” ties in with the Hindu belief in reincarnation. Since Hinduism teaches that animals have souls, they too can be reborn into higher or lower forms.

Tree of Life and Knowledge. Southern India, Late 1500-1600 A.D. Bronze. Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Given anonymously.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Look once again at Figure 8-5. Each animal in the work plays a special part in the Hindu view of life. The goose at the end of each branch, for example, stands for the soul’s ability to “take flight.” The five-headed serpent at the center is a sign of evil and danger.

With a pencil and fine-tipped markers, create your own tree of life. Use the same kind of balance noted in the *Tree of Life and Knowledge*. Fill the branches of your tree with objects that play a part in your personal happiness. Some possibilities are pets, signs of favorite pastimes (a tennis racquet, for example), or good-luck charms. Create decorative patterns of repeated objects similar to the patterns in Figure 8-5. See whether classmates can guess the importance of objects based upon where they appear on your tree.

✓ CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

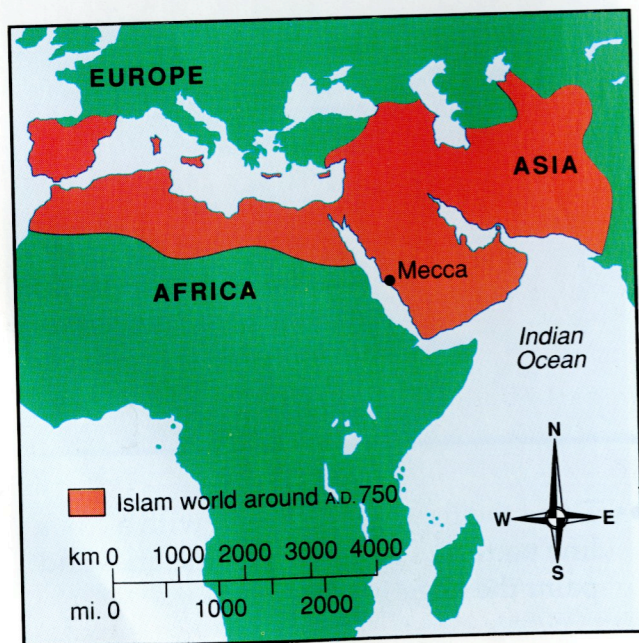
1. What are two key beliefs of Hinduism?
2. What is a stupa?
3. How was the temple shown in Figure 8-3 created?
4. Name three standard features of early Indian Buddhist sculptures.

Art of Islam

Around A.D. 600 Hinduism, which had lost favor in India with the rise of Buddhism, began making a comeback. During this same period another religion was taking shape 2000 miles (3220 km) to the east. This new religion would grow into one of the world's largest, with some half billion followers. Its name is Islam (iz-lahm).

THE GROWTH OF ISLAM

The birthplace of Islam is the city of Mecca (mek-uh), located on the Arabian peninsula. Can you find Mecca on the map in Figure 8-8? There in A.D. 613 a merchant named Muhammad (moh-ham-uhd) began preaching a faith centering on one god. This god, called Allah, had revealed himself to Muhammad during meditation. People who came to share Muhammad's beliefs recognized him as Allah's holy messenger. They, themselves, were called Muslims (muhz-luhms).



Muhammad's lifelong dream was a world united under Islam. By the early 700s, his followers had spread his message to the Middle East, North Africa, Europe, and Asia.

Painting

The Koran (kuh-ran) is the bible of Islam, recording the beliefs of Muhammad. A page from the Koran is shown in Figure 8-9. Some of the finest examples of early calligraphy (kuh-ligg-ruh-fee) are found in this book. **Calligraphy** is a method of beautiful handwriting sometimes using a brush. Notice the circular gold decorations among the flowing letters. **Arabesques** (ar-uh-besks) are the swirling geometric patterns of plant life used as decorations. These became a popular decoration because the early Muslim teachings forbade picturing humans or animals.

Architecture

Muhammad taught that dying in battle for the faith guaranteed Muslims entrance into Paradise. As a result, Islam was often spread through force rather than preaching. Each new conquest was celebrated by the building of a **mosque**, a Muslim house of worship. By the 800s the Muslim capital of Córdoba (kord-uh-vuh), Spain, alone was reported to have 300 mosques.

Figure 8-8 The lands of Islam.



Figure 8-9 Calligraphy means "beautiful writing." The work that opened this chapter on page 112 also makes use of calligraphy. Can you find it in among the figures?

Leaf from Qur'an (Koran), in Maghribi Script. Islamic, North African. c. 1300. Ink, colors and gold on parchment. 53.3 x 55.8 cm (21 x 22"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Rogers Fund.

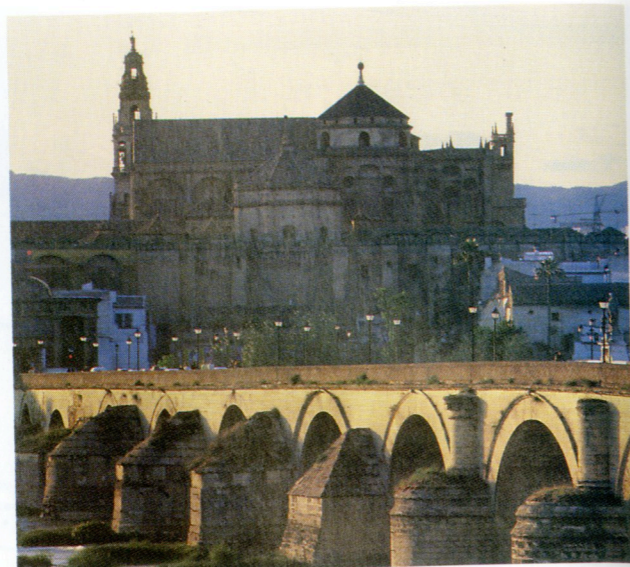
Figures 8-10 and 8-11 show two views of a Spanish mosque begun in the 700s. In Figure 8-10 you can see a **mihrab** (mee-ruh), which is a highly decorated nook found in a mosque. Covered with calligraphic inscriptions from the Koran, the mihrab is found on the wall closest to the holy city of Mecca. The origin and purpose of the mihrab is still a

mystery. Some scholars feel it may honor the place where Muhammad stood in his own house when he led his followers in prayer. It became a standard feature of all mosques. Rising above the outside of such mosques are found one or more minarets (min-uh-rets). A **minaret** is a slender tower from which Muslims are called to prayer five times a day. Can you



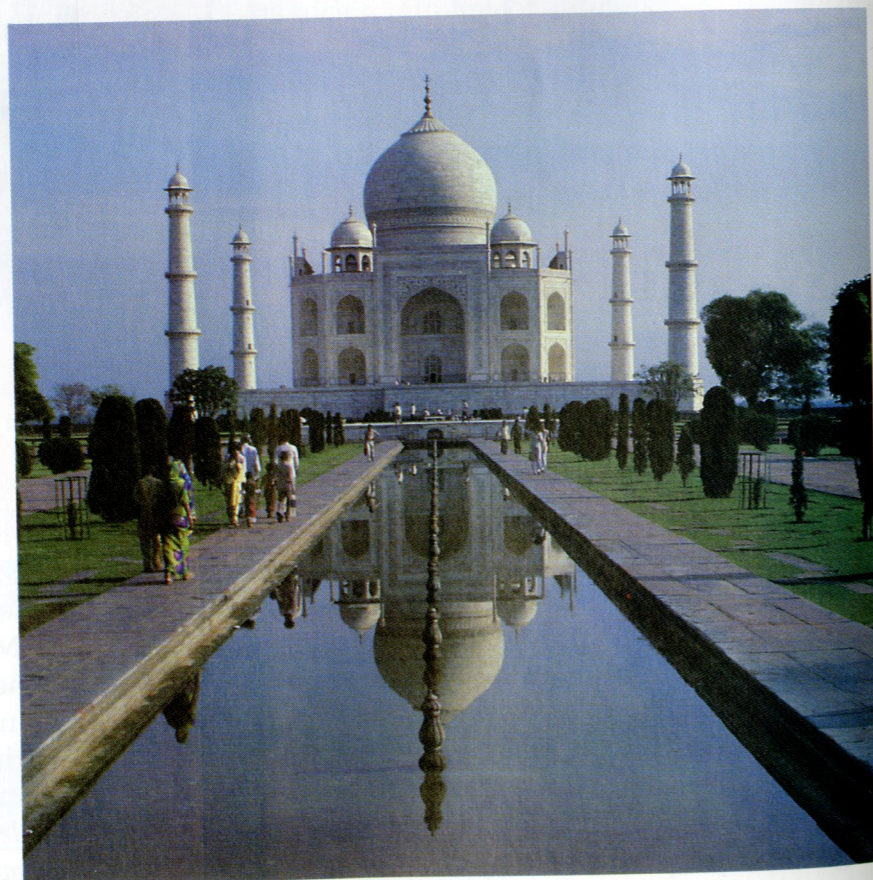
▲ Figure 8-10 Muslims always turn toward Mecca while praying. The mihrab, placed inside a mosque, is a pointer to this holy city.

The Great Mosque of Abd ar-Rahman. 8-12th Century. Moorish. Mihrab with arched dome. Cordoba, Spain.



▲ Figure 8-11 What feeling does this seemingly endless row of columns and arches communicate?

The Great Mosque and Roman Bridge. Cordoba, Spain.



► Figure 8-12 This work was built by a Muslim leader as a memorial to his wife. Notice the perfect symmetry of the building and all that surrounds it.

Taj Mahal, garden and pools. c. 1650. Agra, India.

find the minarets in the famous structure in Figure 8-12? Do you know the name and location of this famous building?

Crafts

One of the most outstanding contributions of Islamic art is the knotted-pile, or Persian, rug. Persian knots in this type of rug are so close together that when the pile (raised loops of yarn) is all worn away the colors of the design are still visible. Figure 8-13 shows a Persian rug dating from 1550. This object uses 18 different shades of wool. Notice the care the weaver has used in balancing the complex design. Can you name the type of pattern running through this carpet?



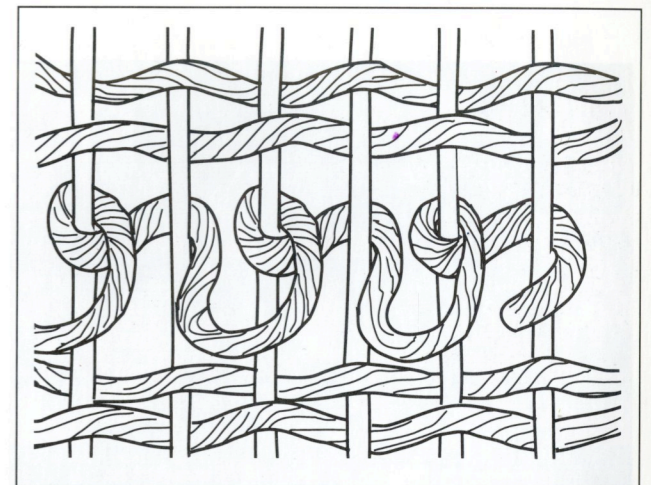
▲ Figure 8-13 A single rug would take one craftsman many years to complete.

Iranian. Prayer rug. 16th Century. Wool, cotton, silk. 161.3 x 108 cm (63½ x 42½"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Mr. and Mrs. Isaac D. Fletcher Collection. Bequest of Isaac D. Fletcher.

STUDIO EXPERIENCE

Look again at Figure 8-13. A feature common to rugs like this is the Persian knot, illustrated in Figure 8-14. Using knots like these, the weaver was able to create an unusually tight weave.

Make a very small cardboard loom and make a warp. (See Chapter 13, Lesson 2, for a description of how to make a warp.) Using a tapestry needle and yarn, alternate rows of Persian knots with rows of tabby (simple over, under, over, under) weave.



▲ Figure 8-14 Persian knot diagram.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Who was Muhammad? When and where did he begin preaching his new faith?
2. What are followers of Muhammad called?
3. What is the Koran? What is calligraphy?
4. What is an arabesque? Why did arabesques become popular?
5. What is a mosque? What are two standard features of mosques?
6. What kind of rugs are Islamic artists famous for?

BUILDING VOCABULARY

Number a sheet of paper from 1 to 8. After each number, write the term from the box that best matches each description below.

arabesques	mihrab
batik	minaret
calligraphy	mosque
collage	stupas

1. Beehive-shaped domed places of worship.
2. A method of designing on fabric using wax and dyes.
3. A method of beautiful handwriting sometimes using a brush.
4. Swirling geometric patterns of plant life used as decorations.
5. A Muslim house of worship.
6. A highly decorated nook found in a mosque.
7. A slender tower from which Muslims are called to prayer.
8. An art work made up of bits and pieces of two-dimensional materials pasted to a surface.

REVIEWING ART FACTS

Number a sheet of paper from 9 to 16. Answer each question in a complete sentence.

9. What two religions have played a major role in the art of India over the last 2500 years?
10. How were Hindu temples like the one shown in Figure 8-3 created?
11. What is the explanation for the unusually long earlobes found on Buddha sculptures?
12. What Hindu belief is revealed in the *Tree of Life and Knowledge* sculpture?
13. What is the name of the god of Islam? How did Muhammad come to know this god?
14. In what book central to the Islam faith was calligraphy used?

15. What buildings did Muslim conquerors raise after each new conquest?
16. What can you see in Persian rugs that reveals the special weaving method with which they were made?

THINKING ABOUT ART

On a sheet of paper, answer each question in a sentence or two.

1. **Interpret.** Read the following statement: "To appreciate fully a work of religious art you must be a member of the religion." Tell whether you agree or disagree. Defend your position with information and examples from this and other chapters.
2. **Compare and contrast.** What common features can you find between Buddhist and Hindu temples? What differences between the two can you note?
3. **Analyze.** Pick one art work from the chapter. Note how the elements of art and principles of art were used in the work. Identify the way they were used.
4. **Extend.** Look once more at the inside view of the mosque in Figure 8-10. How would the experience of walking through this building differ from the experience of seeing it in a photograph? What does this difference reveal to you about ways of looking at art?

MAKING ART CONNECTIONS

1. **Social Studies.** Like Islam, Buddhism spread far from its birthplace. Compare the Japanese sculpture of Buddha you studied in Chapter 5 on page 73 with Figure 8-4. List the ways the two works are alike and different. Note standard style features of each. Identify the influences of culture that led to these similarities and differences.
2. **Language Arts.** Create a verse for a greeting card. Write your poem using a calligraphy style.

LOOKING AT THE DETAILS

The detail shown below is from Sultan Muhammad's *The Feast of Sadeh*. Study the detail and answer the following questions using complete sentences.

1. Can you see evidence of a renowned Islamic craft in this painting?
2. If you were not aware of the origin of this painting and a credit line was not available, what clues do you see that might tell you that it is an Islamic work of art?

3. How would you describe the mood of the top figure? Is the same mood expressed by the lower figure? Explain your answer.
4. Look at the entire work on page 112. Do you think this painting is meant to be "read" in a clockwise or counter clockwise direction? Explain your answer.



Sultan Muhammed. *The Feast of Sadeh*. c. 1520-1522. Colors, ink, silver and gold on paper. 27.4 x 23 cm (9½ x 9¼"). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York. Gift of Arthur A. Houghton, Jr.