

CHAPTER 6- *Paths to Enlightenment*
The Art of South and Southeast Asia before 1200

Summary:

The subcontinent of India is a multicultural grouping of peoples and unique countries. Modern-day makeup of this vast geographic area consists of India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Tibet, Bangladesh and island nation of Sri Lanka.

- India's art and architecture shows a diverse style yet there is a certain similarity.
- Certainly religion has played a tremendous role in the development of Indian artistic style. There is a diversity of religions in India, which have co-existed sometimes peacefully and sometimes not.
- The Buddhist tradition originated in India and became highly influential not only in Southeast Asia but also throughout the world.

The ancient origins of India have been traced to the Indus Valley and spread outward from there as far south as Gujarat and eastward almost to Delhi. Two large areas have been excavated thus far, Mohenjo-daro and Harappa.

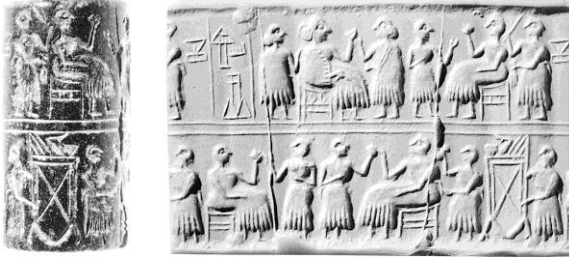
- Based on the archaeological findings it is thought that this civilization was an urban society, a commercially enterprising civilization.
- Both cities were designed on compass points with carefully laid out streets and avenues. An aerial view of Harappa does indicate the precision with which the city was designed. Both cities have a lack of designated palaces or temples. Archaeological evidence thus far cannot identify any structure within either as a palace or a temple.
- Art objects as they are defined were not discovered in either site, most of the objects excavated are small and utilitarian.
- Some sculptures found are made of either stone or metal and are of small in size.



6-2 Robed male figure, from *Mohenjo-daro*, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE.

- Shows an ability to present the human figure.
- The ambiguity lies in the identity of the figure, a king or a priest, thus far there's has been no documentary material discovered to identify the figure of the person of importance or as an actual portrait of a leader or deity.

There has been a vast amount of seals discovered at both sites and likelihood that these seals indicate a relationship with the seals of the Ancient Near East.



2.11 Banquet scene, cylinder seal (left) and its modern impression (right), from the tomb of Pu-abi (tomb 800), Royal Cemetery, Ur (modern Tell Muqayyar), Iraq, ca. 2600 BCE



6-3 Seal with seated figure in yogic posture, from Mohenjo-daro, Pakistan, ca. 2600–1900 BCE

The seals 6-3 were used to identify the owner and perhaps functioned as an official signature or symbol.

- The images on the seals do show a relationship with the seals from Mesopotamia, creatures, recognized and mythical, as well as a narrative, which might indicate the deity.
- The great cities of the Indus Valley were gradually abandoned and allowed to disintegrate.

An Indo-European group, Aryans moved into India from the northwest. Today there is a continuing dispute as to the origins of the Aryans.

- They were herding peoples who gradually moved into India and merged with the indigenous populations.
- It is during this period c. 1500 BCE that Sanskrit was used to compose the four Vedic texts. These are the texts defining the religious doctrines of this period.
- The rituals performed by the Aryan priests or Brahmins were complex and lengthy; however no images of the Aryan gods have been found. Their deities functioned as gods of elements: Indra-Rains, Varuna-Ocean and Surya-Sun another point of significance the Aryan gods were MALE.
- During this period various religious leaders composed texts in reaction to the Vedas, Upanishads which detailed some of the great beliefs of India: *samsara*-reincarnation, *Karma*-past actions are recorded without judgment and these will

determine next reincarnation and *moksha*-ultimate merge into the great cosmos, ending further reincarnations.

■ Siddhartha Gautama centers the birth of Buddhism on the life and struggle for enlightenment. Current scholars place his birth at around 400 BCE and his road to enlightenment followed a path of self-discipline and self-denial. Many subsequent believers and converts followed this path.

■ During the Maurya Dynasty 4th – 2nd centuries BCE, a modified version of Buddhism was used to govern India.

■ Ashoka, the most prominent king of this dynasty conceived of Buddhism or dharma or moral code as the primary system to govern his vast Empire (almost the entire subcontinent). These laws were inscribed on pillars throughout the empire and in a variety of languages so all could read and understand the code and act accordingly.

■ Each pillar was topped with an elaborately carved capital. Ashoka had a pillar carved for Sarnath, the site of Buddha's first sermon and the foundational *dharma*, the Lion capital



■ 6-4 Lion capital of column erected by Ashoka at Sarnath, India, ca. 250 BCE.

■ So marked this momentous event and converted it into an icon for the Maurya Dynasty. The fall of the Maurya Dynasty occurred in the second century BCE. India was then ruled by various dynasties occupying specific geographies.



6-05 Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, third century BCE to first century CE (View from the east).

■ The Great Stupa at Sanchi becomes architecture used as a teaching tool to explain by symbol the teachings of Buddha.

■ The stupa itself becomes a symbol for the cosmos, the World Mountain with cardinal points delineated by the gates (*toranas*). The squared fenced are (*harmika*) atop the dome of the stupa becomes one of the Buddhist paradises.

■ Situated in the center of the *harmika* is a pole, which symbolizes the axis of the universe, and this pole (*yasti*) unites the temporal world with paradise.

- The act of worship required the believer to walk in a clockwise direction around the stupa and climb to the next level and continue the same way.
- The symbolism of the act of worship allows the population to see the order of the world and the universe as Buddha envisioned it, *rational, coherent and symmetrical*.
- In contrast to this rational order is the female figure decorating the eastern gate to the Great Stupa.



6-7 Yakshi, detail of eastern gateway, Great Stupa, Sanchi, India, mid first century BCE to early first century CE

- The sensual position and generous body proportions indicate the duality of the Indian sensitivity. The figure or *yakshi* has a close connection with the population and many times these female figures were worshiped as goddesses of fertility and abundance. It could be suggested the rationality of Buddhism would accept the natural act of procreation and fertility as a possible path to enlightenment.



6-14 Bodhisattva Padmapani, wall painting in Cave 1, Ajanta, India, second half of fifth century.

- The Buddhist caves of Ajanta produced wall murals, which showed the range of the ability of the Indian painter.
- In cave 19 Bodhisattva c. 450=500 CE reveals the artist's facility to create facial expression.
- The warm and tender compassion conveyed by the glance of the Bodhisattva can give the worshiper pause and encouragement in following the teachings of Buddha.
- The Bodhisattva serves as an intermediary for the worshipper to petition for aid and assistance.

■ The Ajanta caves also provide the viewer with a glimpse into the history of Indian painting. Unfortunately, Indian artists did not use permanent materials when creating paintings and so time and the climate (tropical) have caused great losses among these important works of art. The Ajanta caves do give us a glimpse of how well developed painting had become by this period, 5th Century CE.

■ In the first century CE of the last century BCE, Indian artists began to depict Buddha in human form.

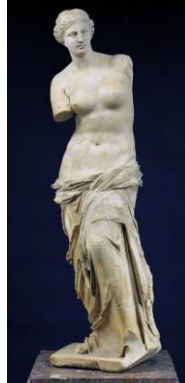
■ In the earliest years of Indian civilization, Indus and Vedic, the gods were not depicted. It could be suggested that the believers who were spreading the teachings of the Buddha now felt the necessity for images to assist in that process.

■ Buddhism had been introduced into China in the late Han period (25-220CE) AND INTO Korea in the late 4th century-early 5th century CE. In the northern area of India existed the Kushan Empire and two important regions within the Empire. Gandhara (largely in Pakistan) and Mathura (about 90 miles south of Dehli) developed a Buddhist sculptural tradition very early.



■ 6-9

5-83



■ The Gandhara *Seated Buddha* 6-9 shows a marked similarity to the Hellenistic work of the late 2nd century BCE. Alexander the Great in his expeditions for conquest made incursions into this area and left a heritage of Hellenistic sculpture, which the Indian artists adapted to fit the new demand for images of Buddha.

■ The Seated Buddha shows that heritage in the wavy hair and the ribbon around the topknot, the stylized draperies of the robe also attest to the Hellenistic influence.

IN contrast to the Gandhara work is the Mathura *Seated Buddha* (6-11)



6-11 Buddha seated on lion throne, from Mathura, India, second century CE.

- Which is closer to the Indian aesthetic vision than the Gandhara version.
- The figure has a closer affinity with the Indian format; the more massive chest and columnar legs show closer relationship to the male version of the *yakshi*. It is the Mathura work that was to become the source for Buddha depictions.

Co-existing with Buddhism was Hinduism and its pantheon of gods and goddesses. In the same way Ashoka used the pillars and *dharma* to set the governing standard, it could be said the Chandragupta also wanted to use the deities to support his rule as just and good.



6-15 Boar avatar of Vishnu rescuing the earth, Cave 5, Udayagiri, India, early fifth century.

- In the Gupta work from Cave V, Udayagiri Iboar Avatar of Vishnu, 6-15, created about 100 years after the Mathura work shows the similarity with the basic style. The same body mass is used to describe the Boar Avatar and the small female, an allegorical figure representing the earth, takes on a similar body mass of the *yakshi* from torana 6-7 of the Great Stupa at Sanchi.



- The political overtones of this relief are based on the story it represents, Vishnu as the Boar comes to earth and saves it from flood and destruction in the form the Serpent-King of the Sea. Chandragupta would take on the guise of Vishnu and the earth would be the Gupta Empire. His rule is saving the Empire.

■ In another work from a different site is the *Shiva as Mahadeva* from



Elephanta 6-17 Shiva as Mahadeva, Cave 1, Elephanta, India, ca. 550–575.

■ This work presents the three aspects of Shiva and it also presents one of the foundations of the Hindu religion, dualities and its paradoxes.

■ In this work we see the three faces of Shiva, the center face is Shiva as the balance between the other two aspects of the god.

■ The image on the left of the center face represents the male aspect of the god and also the destructive force, Bhairava and the image on the right represents the female aspect of the god, the creative force, Uma.

■ In the Chola Dynasty (9th–13th C. CE), bronze casting was a fine art and this illustrated by the *Shiva as Nataraja* (6-24)



Shiva as Nataraja, bronze in the Nattunai Ishvaram Temple, Punjai, India, ca. 1000.

■ This portable bronze work represents Shiva as the Lord of the Dance. He is stamping out ignorance, represented the small dwarf beneath his leg, he is also reaching out with his four arms to create the cosmic dance in rhythm to drum beat, which is steady and constant. This becomes a symbol for the cosmos and the creation cycle, steady and constant.

HINDU TEMPLE

The Hindu temple represents the preoccupation with humanity's release from the world of illusion and its subsequent absorption into the divine. It is the place where anyone may approach the gods. The location is important and often associated with water, shady groves and seclusion.

■ The temple itself is based on precise measurements that echo the divine order of the universe and serve as diagram for the cosmos. Temples are oriented to the cardinal points, following the path of the sun. Temples were originally

constructed of wood or reeds that have long since disappeared. The earliest extant examples, such as the entrance to the Lomas Rishi Cave, Barabar Hills, was constructed in the third century BCE show in the stone carvings of the arch the shape of wooden arches. The roofs of the 7th century CE rock-cut temples of



Mamallapuram. 6-20 resembles the thatched roofs of houses in southern India.



The basic core of the Hindu temple can be seen in the Vishnu Temple at



Deogarh 6-18

■ The Vishnu Temple becomes the mountain and its interior the cave in which the divinity dwells. The temple may represent the magic mountain that contains the sacred cave or it can be the cosmic axis; but temples are always the temporary dwelling places of the gods and goddesses.

■ The superstructure of the temple is known as the mountain peak or crest (*sikhara*). Thus for the worshipper, the entry into the cave or sanctuary was always accompanied by an ascent to the symbolic mountain peak located directly over the cave or sanctuary. This recreates the axis of the cosmos, and can be seen in the 11th through 12th centuries Lingaraja Temple in Bhuvaneshvar. The temple becomes the meaning and the form for Hindu worship.

Southeast Asia includes the modern nation of Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. No longer is Southeast Asia considered an extension of either India or China. Each independent nation within the rubric of Southeast Asia is vital and singular in their own artistic endeavors; however there have been cross-cultural influences coming from both India and China.

■ These cross-cultural currents came as a result of the spread of Buddhism from India. This philosophy, which became a religion spread throughout the area, presented a vision of religion did blend self-discipline and self-denial with self-love and that idea spread rapidly throughout Southeast Asia.

■ In Sri Lanka Buddhism arrived in the 3rd c. BCE and remained a bedrock for the people, the *Buddha Gal Vihara* 6-25 sculpted in the 12th =13th c. depicts a reclining Buddha.



6.25

■ Located near Polonnaruwa, this version of the Buddha has two explanations, he has reached *Parinirvana* that is death or the Buddha is simply meditating in a reclining position. The Sri Lanka followers of Buddhism follow the earliest form, Theravada Buddhism, which stresses the worship of the historical Buddha, the Sri Lanka interpretation for this Buddha is not his death but rather he is mediating while lying down.

■ The Indian influence could be suggested to come from the very presentation of the figure of Buddha; but the Sri Lanka interpretation has been modified to fit within the aesthetic vision of the people and suits their religious interpretation.

Java provides another view of Buddhism as represented by Borobudur c. 800CE

6-26



■ This form of the *mandala* or magic diagram of the cosmos was first used in India; however, at Borobudur it is clearly seen in the aerial view. The pilgrim (borobudur was an important pilgrimage site) walks around the monument in a clockwise pattern, following the path ever upward through the three spheres of Buddhist cosmology.

■ The first level or square represents the Sphere of Human Desire and it is richly decorated, the next level, the Sphere of Form has countless Bodhisattvas who sit serenely and offer assistance to the pilgrim.

■ The final level at the top is the Sphere of Formlessness; the shape of the stupa symbolizes the final release and complete merging within the cosmos.

■ Cambodia shows the blend of Buddhism and Hinduism as it was used to create a visual vocabulary for the Khmer rulers. At Angkor Wat (6-29)



there is a certain resemblance to the Visvanatha Temple in Khajuraho (6-22)



Constructed in c. 1000CE. However the Cambodian version has modified the silhouette to fit the context of the Khmer political and religious needs. These structures had to serve multiple purposes. They served as personal temples dedicated to the king's ancestors. The people usually were not permitted to enter into the temples as this was the dwelling place of the deity and who was also the personal deity of the king. This complex became not only a religious site; but it also became a vehicle to express the political ambitions and connections of the ruler.

In the lowest gallery on the inner wall is a relief of Suryavarman II (1113-50) holding court (6-30). The temple becomes an extension of the king and the deities support his right to rule, in the same way Ashoka and Chandragupta tried to align their deities.

However, Suryavarman II created a more focused image of himself and the gods. That same concept was created again only this time in the Bayon commissioned by Jayvarman VII (1181-1218). It has been suggested that Jayavarman's portrait is on the façade 6.31 as well. It is this blending that shows the richness of the heritage of Southeast Asia and India.



6.31