

Objects related to Hinduism at The Ashmolean

- Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal and exists among significant populations outside of the sub continent. Hinduism does not have a single founder or single scripture or a commonly agreed set of teachings.
- Objects and artefacts at The Ashmolean can be used to explore ideas and art relating to Hinduism across different countries and times.
- Religion has played a central role in Indian life and culture for at least four thousand years. Between 500 BC and AD 500 the major historic religions of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism were developing to maturity. Most surviving works of art from that period were inspired by their teachings.
- Many of the Hindu images on display were once installed in temples or household shrines as objects of daily devotion and meditation. They convey the serenity, compassion and supreme power or insight of deities and enlightened beings. Images like these remain in worship today throughout India, as well as in the Himalayan region and Southeast Asia.

Galleries containing objects related to Hinduism

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

Gallery 33: Mughal India

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

1. Model of a Shiva temple, bronze, southern Karnataka or Tamilnadu, 1600-1800.



This model of a south Indian temple has a hinged lid for use as a container. The temple has rows of bulls and deities, including Shiva, Parvati, Karttikeya and Ganesha at the cardinal points on each side. EA2005.10

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

2. Krishna Vatapatrashayi, bronze, Tamilnadu, 1600-1800



Krishna as a baby 'lying on the banyan leaf', while sucking his toes, is a popular image in south India. *Displayed lying down.*

EA1958.175

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

3. Standing figure of Parvati, bronze, Tamilnadu, about AD 950



This image, probably of Parvati (Uma), would have accompanied one of her consort, Shiva. The goddess stands with her weight resting on her left leg, her right leg slightly flexed. Her right hand makes the gesture called *Kataka hasta*, within which a flower bud or bloom was sometimes held. This is the pose of all the images of feminine deities which accompany statues of Shiva or Vishnu, often one on either side with one as a mirror image of the other. EA1987.13

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

4. Portable shrine of Vishnu as Venkateshwara



Portable shrines of this kind were used by travelling priests who narrated the stories of Vishnu and his incarnations. The shrine has extendable folding doors painted with scenes of Vishnu in his various forms, the stories of Rama and Krishna and other subjects.

EAX.264

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

5. Figure of Nandi, the bull of Shiva, Deccan or South India, basalt, 1500 - 1700



A young bull, known as Nandi in the later periods, often accompanies images of Shiva, as the god's associated vehicle or animal (*vahana*). Bull images of this kind are often positioned in front of a Shiva temple, facing towards the deity within the inner shrine.

EAOS.77

Gallery 12: India to AD 600

6. Vishnu, stone, Sagar Island, West Bengal, about 1050



This carving depicts the four-armed god Vishnu holding his attributes of the mace, discus and conch, while his fourth hand makes the gesture of benediction (*varada*). The various incarnations of Vishnu appear in the small scenes above his two attendants. Li894.12

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

7. Figure of Varaha, the Boar, incarnation of Vishnu, stone, North India, Madhya Pradesh or Bihar, c. AD 900



In a creation myth, Vishnu took the form of a boar to rescue Bhudevi, the Earth goddess from the depths of the primordial waters. In this sculpture, Bhudevi stands to the right of the boar's head, while a serpent-goddess (nagini) appears in front. Rows of sages, deities and other figures appear on the body of the cosmic boar. The prominent conch shell, discus and mace below are all symbols of Vishnu. EA1969.43

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

8. Dancing Ganesha, stone, Western India, AD 650-750



This carving shows Ganesha dancing joyfully, flanked by musicians. He holds a mango or sweetmeat which he savours with his trunk. One of India's most popular deities, the elephant-headed god is invoked by Hindus at the beginning of a new enterprise. EA1994.111

Gallery 32: India from AD 600

9. Shiva and Parvati, sandstone, 1000-1050, Madhya Pradesh



Shiva Maheshvara (the 'great god') embraces his consort Uma or Parvati. Ganesha, the bull Nandi, the ascetic Bhiringi and Uma's lion appear below.

EAOS70

Gallery 33: Mughal India

10. Soapstone figures,



Jaipur craftsmen produced brightly painted soapstone (alabaster) images of Hindu and Jain deities in great numbers in the late nineteenth century. This is one of eight planetary deities belonging to a large group of similar images presented by the Maharaja of Jaipur in the 1880s.

EAX.2519-26, EAX.2561

Lines of enquiry RE:

- Consider how historical artefacts can help develop knowledge and understanding about religious beliefs and teachings.
- Look at how objects reflect the influence of religion on individuals, communities and societies and their links with peace and conflict.
- Consider the role of religious beliefs, teaching and practices in society and how they are represented by objects and artworks.
- Explore how objects represent values, meaning, purpose, truth and their influences on human life and relationships.
- Explore the geographical spread of Hinduism over time.

Lines of enquiry: Art & Design

- Research different materials, media and techniques used to create Hindu sculpture and models.
- Explore distinctive regional styles of sculpture, art and architecture.
- Explore Hindu artefacts created for use in public and private spaces. How are they similar or different?
- Explore the impact of the style, design and materials used in Eastern art on Western



Figure of Vishnu and Lakshmi, or Lakshmi-Narayana, EA1965.161

Working with objects: key questions

- Who made it?
- Where and when was it made?
- What materials is it made from?
- How was it made?
- What was it used for? How was it used?
- Who used / owned it?
- How might it be interpreted by different people? at different times?



Figure of Devi dancing in a ring of fire, bronze, 8th century AD EA2013.70

Further resources

Ashmolean's Eastern Art collection online
<http://www.jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/>

Ashmolean Education Learning Resources:
www.ashmolean.org/learning-resources

Pilgrimage
<http://jameelcentre.ashmolean.org/>

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