

The Hindu Temple

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

The art and architecture of Hindu temples contrasts greatly with that of the Indian Buddhist stupa. There are basic features of the Hindu temple, and the function of this temple is specific. In this lesson, you will learn about:

1. Time Period and Location: The Hindu Temple
2. Hinduism
3. The Hindu Temple
4. Vishnu Temple at Deogarh
5. Khajuraho Temple Complex
6. Shiva Nataraja

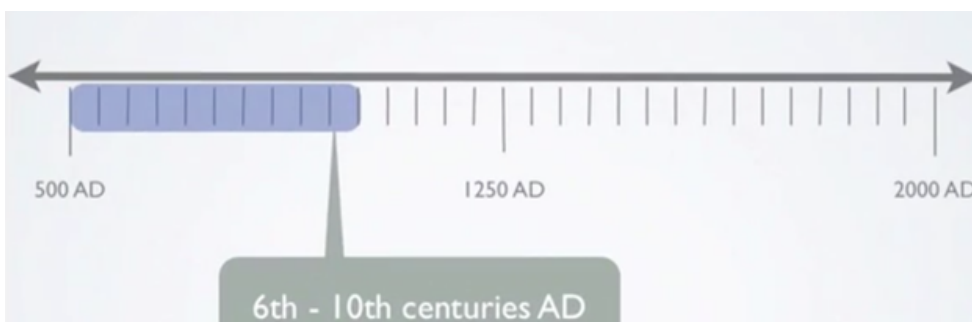


BIG IDEA

The vibrant art and architecture of the Hindu temple contrasts noticeably with the more reserved appearance of the Indian Buddhist stupa.

1. Time Period and Location: The Hindu Temple

The art and architecture from today dates from the 6th to the 10th centuries CE, highlighted in the timeline below. This lesson will explore temple architecture and sculpture from two locations in India, Deogarh and Khajuraho.



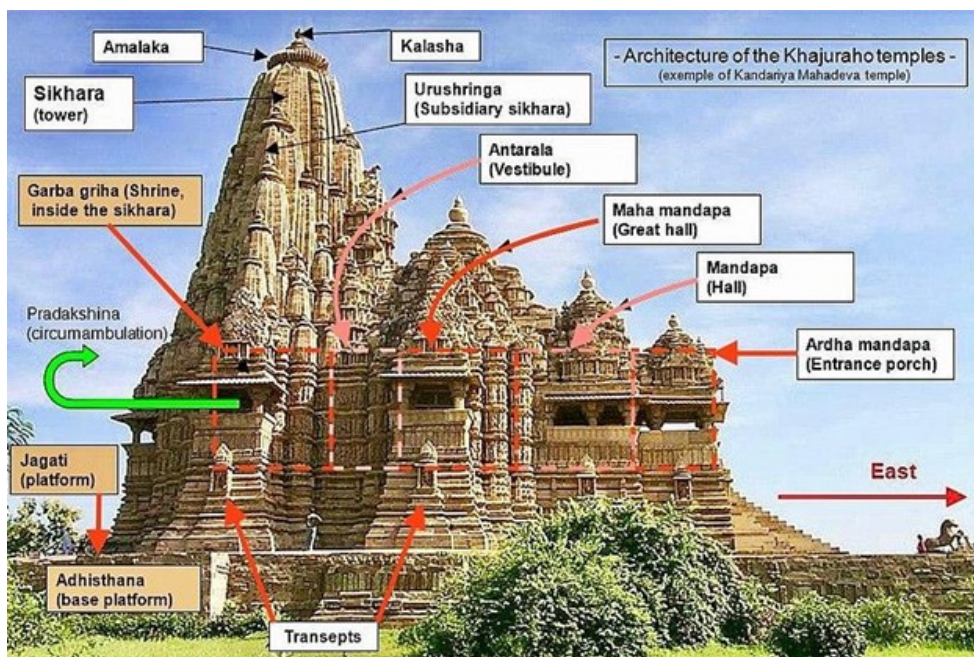
2. Hinduism

Hinduism is an extremely old (roughly 4,000 years old) system of beliefs. It is essentially considered a polytheistic religion that includes the worship of many variations or manifestations of many different deities. These many manifestations and many forms of deities appear to be simultaneously faces of a single god while retaining the individual characteristics of multiple gods.

This idea of multiple perspectives is fundamental to Hinduism, as it helps explain how Hinduism appears to weave between polytheism and monotheism.

3. The Hindu Temple

Hindu temples were considered a god's home on earth. The layout of many Hindu temples is based on the concept of a mandala, or a cosmic diagram. The **garbhagriha**, or womb room, where the statue of the deity is housed, is positioned over the mandala. This, along with the sculptures located on the exterior of the temple, provides spiritual protection for the image of the deity. The mountain shape **shikhara**, referring to the peak of a mountain, is typical of northern-style temples.



Ordinary worshippers stand near the entrance and **mandapa**, which is a public gathering place. The most sacred inner chamber, the **garbhagriha**, is essentially a “womb room” where the deities, idols, or icons are located. These rooms are usually only accessible by high priests, or brahman. Certain temples focus on **bhakti**, or loving devotion to the deity. At these temples, devotees provide service to the deity, leaving offerings of food, flowers, clothing, incense, or praying. The goal of these actions is also known as **darshan**, or making eye contact with the deity.



TERMS TO KNOW

Shikhara

The roof of a Hindu temple.

Mandapa

In Indian architecture, a pillared outdoor hall for public ceremonies.

Garbhagriha

The innermost sanctum of the Hindu temple that houses deities, idols, or icons.

Bhakti

Loving devotion to a deity that can be performed by any individual.

4. Vishnu Temple at Deogarh

Below is an image of the Vishnu temple from Deogarh.



Vishnu Temple

Deogarh, India

500 CE

Stone and masonry brick



DID YOU KNOW

Vishnu is one of the primary deities in Hinduism and is known as the preserver of cosmic order. He has nineteen avatars, or incarnations, that restore cosmic order when it is threatened.

This is an old structure with construction dating from the 5th to 6th centuries. It is an example of a Gupta-style Hindu temple. It's rectangular with a tower that originally would have been about 40 feet tall. Even though the building is rather simple in its design, it's decorated with elaborate sculptural reliefs, in particular, the sculptural guardians that protect the entrance. This temple is dedicated to ten avatars of Vishnu, some of which are depicted in sculptures on the exterior. The sculpture that was originally housed in the temple interior has been lost.

5. Khajuraho Temple Complex

Below is an outer view of the Kandariya Mahadeva temple complex at Khajuraho, India. This is one of a group of Hindu and Jain temples at this location. Originally, there were around 85 temples here, of which 25 have survived.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple

Khajuraho, India

1000 CE

Sandstone

This is an example of the northern style of temple design in India. It's made of sandstone.

The progressive dome shapes that culminate with the large shikhara, which is the mountain-shaped roof, are the most distinguishing features of the northern-style temple.

The Himalayan mountain range in the north of India was believed to be the home of Shiva, another principal deity. The temple design was symbolic of the gradual ascent from foothill to the highest mountaintop in the Himalayas. In the interior, a garbhagriha under the shikhara contains the image of Shiva.

The temples at this complex are notable for the elaborate, vibrant, and erotic sculptural reliefs adorning the exterior.

➞ EXAMPLE Here's an image of some of the exterior sculpture at Kandariya Mahadeva:



Exterior sculpture at Kandariya Mahadeva Temple

Khajuraho, India

1000 CE

Sandstone

➞ EXAMPLE And here is an image from another temple at Khajuraho, called the Visvanatha Temple:



Exterior sculpture at Visvanatha Temple

Madhya Pradesh, India

1000 CE

Sandstone



DID YOU KNOW

Visvanatha means “lord of the world.”

The above images, from the north side of the temple, are called the **maithuna** reliefs, which is a Sanskrit term related to sexual union. The idea is that these sculptures are auspicious since they are associated with fertility and creation, and that they bring positive energy and protection to the temple, particularly at the locations that are considered “weak,” such as where the mandapa and the garbhagriha meet.



THINK ABOUT IT

Maithuna imagery contrasts sharply with the Western, Christian view of sexuality, which teaches that outside of marriage and procreation, it is sinful. In Hinduism, sexual union creates positive energy, making the two people involved into temporary incarnations of Shiva and **Shakti**, or male and female energy. Maithuna imagery also serves as an example of the union between deity and devotee. The story of Krishna (the eighth avatar of Vishnu) and Radha often serves as a metaphor for this relationship. You might also consider the yakshi and how the exaggerated features of this figure also evoke the concepts of fertility, protection, and positivity.



TERMS TO KNOW

Maithuna

Sexual union for the purpose of creating divine energy.

Shakti

Female divine energy, often personified as a goddess.

6. Shiva Nataraja

This last image is of a solid bronze sculpture called the Shiva Nataraja, which means “lord of the dance.”



Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)

1000 CE

Bronze

The above sculpture is intended to be portable and is considered a physical embodiment of the deity, not just a sacred image. Smaller, portable images of deities are often taken out of the temple on special occasions, draped with wreaths of flowers and robes, and carried on platforms during processions. These sculptures are treated as the actual deity and cared for like a real person, or a **personal god**. This personification is intended to encourage the bhakti, or active involvement, on the part of the worshipper. Bhakti was also a common form of worship that has a close association with Hindu temples and distinguishes Hinduism from other religions.

This sculpture of Shiva references the idea of time being an endless cycle, with Shiva both destroying and creating it. He is dancing within a flaming halo and trampling a dwarf that represents illusion or ignorance. In one hand he holds the drum that makes the first sounds of creation, and in another, the fire that will destroy it. Yet another of his hands is held in the “do not fear” mudra, suggesting that cycles of creation and destruction should not be feared, and neither should Shiva. He has a tranquil facial expression, but his hair is flying out behind his head.



TERM TO KNOW

Personal God

A god that people can relate to as a person, rather than as an energy force or other abstract concept.



SUMMARY

The art and architecture of the Hindu temple contrasts greatly with other temples. In this lesson, you learned about the **time period and location of the Hindu temple**. **Hinduism and the Hindu temple** were explored in this lesson. The idea of multiple perspectives is fundamental to Hinduism, as it helps explain how Hinduism appears to weave between polytheism and monotheism. Sculptural motifs in these Hindu temples are more than decorative, as the gods themselves are thought to be manifested through the imagery of the temple. These temples are sacred buildings.

Finally, you looked at examples of the Hindu temple:

- **Vishnu Temple at Deogarh**
- **Khajuraho Temple Complex**
- **Shiva Nataraja**

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TERMS TO KNOW

Bhakti

Loving devotion to a deity that can be performed by any individual.

Garbhagriha

The innermost sanctum of the Hindu temple that houses deities, idols, or icons.

Maithuna

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Mandapa

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