

# India: A Celebration!



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## Historical Introduction

*Note: This packet was produced to accompany the exhibition, India: A Celebration, shown at the Asian Art Museum in Fall 1997.*

In honor of 50 years of independence, the Asian Art Museum's exhibition *India: A Celebration!* has brought together several small shows to highlight facets of Indian culture: traditional Hindu temple sculpture, manuscript painting illustrating religious stories and verse, utensils and imagery created for daily home worship, saris woven for temple and secular use, and photographs demonstrating the development of photo journalism and art photography in India. This packet presents material from the first three sections of the exhibition and explores the abiding traditions that give voice to the deepest concerns and cultural roots of India. Although Hinduism is not the only religion practiced on the vast subcontinent of India, it is by far the most widespread. Muslims at 11 percent, Christians at 2.6 percent, Sikhs at 2 percent, and small numbers of Jains and Buddhists account for about 16 percent of the population. The Muslim population in India is the second largest concentration of Muslims residing in a single nation, second only to Indonesia. This mix of religions brings an element of diversity into Indian life.

Although the government is secular and embraces participation from all groups, Hindu culture exerts a strong influence in the country. Its traditional arts and practices continue to be important components of Indian culture, and this exhibition reflects that. The packet presents layers of Hindu imagery, from temple sculpture and worship, to objects for daily home rituals, and illustrations of Hindu texts painted for private enjoyment.

### Indian Independence

In honor of the 50th anniversary, let us first look briefly at the forces behind and leading up to India's independence.

Who was the independence from? India had been dominated by foreign powers for over 400 years before 1947. Islamic invasions claimed power over many regions in the north for even longer than that, but none had penetrated so far or lasted so long as the Mughals who established themselves in Delhi in 1524. Akbar (1556-1605), the third of the Mughal emperors was the most daring, creative, tolerant, and humane of the emperors. Inviting religious teachers of Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism to sit down in his court to debate theological issues, he attempted to establish a new syncretic faith. Though he embraced this new faith himself, it did not take hold and survive him. He was succeeded by progressively more conservative, intolerant Islamic rulers who undid all the efforts Akbar had made to bring the country together with tolerance, peace, and economic justice. The policies of his successors drove an ever deeper wedge between the two cultures which has been perpetuated by some up to the present day.

The British arrived in India as latecomers in the European competition for dominance of the spice trade. (It was, of course, this same quest that propelled Christopher Columbus across the Atlantic. In his search of a new, and hopefully faster and safer route to India and the Spice Islands of Indonesia, he

bumped into the territory unknown to the Europeans that became known as the Americas). Finding the spice island trade already fiercely dominated by the United Dutch East India Company, British traders began to establish ports of trade in India, where they found pepper, tea, and textiles to buy. They made their first contacts with the Mughal emperor Jehangir, Akbar's son, in 1609 and were given permission to establish a factory on the west coast of India. By the end of the seventeenth century they had received concessions to build defensible enclaves on land along the coast at Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay. Trade was brisk, and the English East India Company prospered. However, as the Indians were not only quite self sufficient with what they had, but also had thriving export industries and balance of trade, the Europeans were forced to spend hard cash for the goods they so greatly desired. An ambassador of the English East India Company to the Mughal court bemoaned that "Europe bleedeth to enrich Asia."<sup>1</sup> To mitigate this flow the English exported the raw cotton and silk, wove it in the new, fast industrial factories in England and shipped it back to India for local consumption, driving out the competition and taxing it as well.

The English East India Company, which was supported by both private and government money, was given strict orders from the beginning not to get involved with local politics and war. However, as the later Mughal emperors lost control of the country, rulers of various regions attempted to seize as much power as they could, and in response the English felt compelled to back one group or another to protect their investments. Finally, in 1857, India was completely dominated by the British and became a part of the British Empire, with Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India. Expansion of the foreign community caused it to become more insulated from the local population. This led to widespread disrespect and economic and social injustice for the Indian population, which in turn promoted Indian self determination.

Missionaries had followed close on the heels of the mercantile interests. While teaching Christianity, the missionaries produced grammars for the vernacular languages and established schools for ordinary citizens. Western science was both taught to Indians and applied for the modernization of India. Western learning even played a role in the Hindu revival, through western archaeological, textual studies, and linguistic interests because the seeing, restoring, and studying of evidence of India's long and illustrious past stimulated national pride. As the education and communication infrastructures spread, and Indians learned more about their own past, as well as about European democracy, nationalism grew and Indians began to demand changes in British rule.

Mahatma Gandhi was one of the strongest voices for Indian independence from England. In his efforts to throw off colonial rule, he encouraged return to self sufficiency through cottage industries, particularly spinning and weaving, and acts of civil disobedience such as gathering salt. He elevated certain Hindu values, such as reverence for life and non-violence while advocating the abolishment of the caste system. Others were more forceful in their nationalism, which, unfortunately, expressed strong Hindu sentiments that ultimately led to partition. Hindus equated this period of efforts to overthrow the oppressor to Hindu myths of the gods incarnating to restore order and balance and rescue mother earth. A newspaper printed the following in 1919: "This motherland . . . is the symbol of our nation-idea . . . the Divine Idea, the Logos, which has been revealing itself through the entire course of our past historic evolution. The Motherland is really the synthesis of all the goddesses that have been, and are still being, worshipped by Hindus."<sup>2</sup>

By the early 1930's the agitation was strong though still officially focused on changes within the system. However, pressure for a free and independent India was increasing rapidly, espoused by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, leaders of the Indian National Congress. The issue was brought to a climax by the necessities of World War II, especially the issue of Indian soldiers fighting for their British overlords (see the special India issue of *The New Yorker*, June 23 & 30, 1997).

By 1945 at the end of the war, it was no longer possible for the British to deny India self rule within the Commonwealth nor slow it down. The question was not if, or even when—it was how. The biggest issue now was the conflict between groups of Indians, primarily the Muslims and the Hindus. Tensions created by equally strong religious and cultural revival movements in both groups had been building since the 1920's. These fires were fanned by the British policy, under Winston Churchill, of divide and conquer. Gandhi and Nehru were strong spokesmen for an all Indian Union, while Mohammed Ali Jinnah, leader of the Muslim League, pressed for partition. Gandhi declared that Indian Muslims were more Indian than Muslim, as the ancestors of many were Hindus who had converted to Islam, some out of fear for their lives and their livelihood during periods of Muslim domination. The important thing was to wrench the motherland free from Western imperialists for all Indians. Jinnah proclaimed that the Muslim and Hindu cultures were completely separate and parallel and that Muslim minority interests would always be outvoted in an Indian democratic state. In a vehemently anti-Hindu remark to a French journalist, Jinnah is supposed to have said: "How can you even dream of Hindu-Moslem unity? Everything pulls us apart: We have not intermarriages. We have not the same calendar. The Moslems believe in a single God, and the Hindu are idolatrous. . . . Now again, the Hindus worship animals. They consider cows sacred. We, the Moslems, think it is nonsense. We want to kill the cows. We want to eat them. Another thing: no Hindu will take food from a Moslem."<sup>3</sup> Such incendiary statements doomed a united India.

In the end, partition became inevitable and along with the joys of independence from Britain, came the horrors of death and destruction as tens of thousands of Hindus caught in Pakistan and Muslims in India were robbed, raped, and murdered before they could reach safety. Partition caused one of the largest and most tragic migrations of people in modern history.

The religious and nationalistic fervor which generated the energy to win self rule also created the majority/minority tensions that brought on the partition of the subcontinent that remains today. It is a legacy of the past that challenges India's government in its determination to remain secular and give voice to all sectors of the population.

# Introduction to Hinduism

## Origins of Hinduism

Hinduism does not have any founder or even a single time of origin. It embodies religious sentiment, ritual, and imagery that developed in India over millennia. In unearthing sites of the Harappan culture of about 2000 BCE, archaeologists discovered small images and seals that probably portray the earliest religious formulations of the Indian subcontinent. Two features stand out, the depiction of figures in the yogic pose of meditation, and the prominent inclusion of animal imagery as symbols of power and perhaps mystery. Some appear as emblems of the four directions, others are composite animals and sometimes animal heads are joined to human bodies. There are also many small goddess images and phallic stones. All of these concepts recur in later Hindu art.

Waves of immigration from the northwest, from areas of modern Iran, appear to have taken place from at least 1750 BCE. Often referred to as the Aryan Invasion, these migrations now are considered to have taken place more or less peacefully over a long period of time. There were local skirmishes, but it is believed that the Harappan culture had already waned. The Aryan language was Sanskrit, which has affinities with the Indo-Germanic languages of Western Asia and Europe. (There is some current debate about which way the language traveled, as some researchers believe that Sanskrit was an Indian language that traveled north.)<sup>4</sup>

The Indo-Aryan culture left no imagery. Their religious ideas were preserved through oral transmission and were written down only centuries later as the Vedas. These four texts, compilations made between ca. 1200-800 BCE, form the core of not only the ancient Vedic religion, but also of later Hinduism (see slide 7 for an illustration of a myth about the rescuing of the Vedas from a great flood). Oral transmission was not abandoned after this time. It is still regarded as an important part of the transmission of sacred knowledge. Even today brahmin priests are given rigorous training in exact memorization of the sacred hymns and prayers. The oldest of the texts, the Rig Veda, ca. 1500-900 BCE is composed of hymns and prayers to the gods, from which we can glean some understanding of the people, their desires (they prayed a lot for material things), their nomadic livelihood (the great importance of the cattle and the cow), and a sense of their history and movement into the area (their reveling in horses, chariots, and conquest). The Brahmanas which record instructions for rituals, follow closely upon the Vedas and were incorporated into them. They were compiled between ca. 800-600 BCE. Of the later texts, the Upanishads, which at their earliest coincide with the later Brahmanas in time, are the most original as they contribute a new quality of mystery and philosophical speculation. They reformulate the Vedic concepts and rituals to include a deeper understanding of their underlying symbolic meaning. To some, this suggests a resurgence of earlier Harappan religion, which had actually been continuously practiced by a segment of the population.

The Vedic religion, or Brahmanism, as it is also called, was highly ritualistic, and depended upon the role of the brahmin (priest), who perform sacrifices to invoke the favor of the gods. The ritual fire was the central component of the altar and was the agent of carrying the sacrificial offerings the gods (see slide 13 for illustration of a later use of this ritual in the wedding ceremony). Sacrifices of butter, animals, and even humans were recorded. The two principle gods were Agni, the God of Fire (think

of the word ignite), and Indra, the thunderbolt wielding King of the Gods (not unlike Zeus). Other deities, of the thirty-three Vedic gods, include: Rudra, the disruptive storm god; Vishnu, a sun and sky god; and Saraswati, the goddess of wisdom and music.

Other texts from the later Vedic period include the two great epics, the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. These two texts, featuring Krishna and Rama, two incarnations of Vishnu, were written and edited over time and seem to include elements of the non-Aryan or non-Vedic culture that was also present at this time. They contain many layers of meaning. On one level, they probably reflect the historical battles that were taking place as larger territories were being amassed by feuding kings, who were replacing the many chieftains of the earlier Vedic period. The events may be about actual kings, but the stories have been cast as myths and their heroes as gods. The Mahabharata incorporates stories of the life and tasks of Krishna. In the section called the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna gives religious instruction to the warrior Arjuna. Rama, the hero of the Ramayana, also an incarnation of Vishnu, is born to subdue the demon Ravana, a symbol of unbridled greed and power, to restore order and balance in the world. He is the role model of the good king who holds loyalty, duty, service, and uprightness above personal pleasure, power, and gain.

Features of these two early cultures, the Harappan and Aryan, gradually combined to become the religion we call Hinduism (see What is India? handout). Around the middle of the first millennium BCE, the Brahmanical religion was challenged by many groups. Movements for reform were initiated. The most well known of these movements produced the heterodox religions of Buddhism and Jainism. Other pressures for reform eventually led to the formation of Hinduism which preserves Brahmanical ritual, texts and beliefs, while also including many concepts that appear to have their origin in the older Harappan, or Indus Valley, culture.

Important texts from the early Hindu period are the Puranas. These describe the gods, their iconography, and their stories. With Hinduism some of the Vedic gods are by others and ancient ones. Thus a new hierarchy of gods emerged, with the Trimurthi (three bodies) or Trinity, of the one Supreme Godhead (Brahman): Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver, and Shiva, the Destroyer assuming the primary roles (see slides 1, 2, 3 and 5 and the handout Introducing Hindu Deities). The Goddess also began to re-emerge as the feminine aspect of the divine. She is shakti, the energy which enlivens the gods and is represented as their consort. The goddesses also manifest in their own right as powerful, independent deities (see slides 1, 6, 10). Embracing many minor religious traditions the Hindu pantheon grew to the legendary “330 million gods.” Some became the attendants of the major gods, others maintained a specialized identity, while some of the animal deities serve the gods as vehicles or vahanas. Shiva, for instance, has a host of followers known as the ganas, (see Appendix A). The elephant-headed god, Ganesha (see slide 4), is the lord (isvara) of the ganas and the son of Shiva and Parvati. Shiva’s vehicle is the bull Nandi; Parvati’s is the lion or tiger. Animals may also be forms of god, such as the Matsya the fish, and Varaha, the boar, incarnations of Vishnu. Each of the multiplicity of deities represents one aspect of the activity of Brahman, the Ultimate Being (see also the handout Introducing Hindu Deities).

## Hindu Beliefs

Hinduism, which evolved from the religious practices and philosophical beliefs of India's ancient past, is the oldest, continuously practiced religion in the world. There is no founder or set doctrine and this has allowed it to embrace many forms and has given it the flexibility to accept reform while remaining true to its essential beliefs. Hindus believe in the cyclical nature of time with cosmic cycles of creation, evolution, destruction, and re-creation. These cycles also pertain to the lives of all beings, who are subject to the laws of samsara or reincarnation. Karma, a law of cause and effect, determines the life into which a being is born. In each life, one is given the responsibility to live according to one's dharma, or the divine and social laws of conduct. In some issues, the laws may vary according to one's status and occupation in life. Good deeds are rewarded by a higher rebirth, and bad deeds of a lower one, in human, animal, or plant form. The goal of life, for a Hindu, is moksha, or liberation from the endless cycles of rebirth, to achieve unity with Brahman, the Ultimate Being, or World Soul.

For Hindus, religion is a way of life permeating every aspect of their existence. The beliefs in karma, samsara and the goal of moksha or liberation, determined that the prevailing activities of the culture are directed towards liberation. Several paths lead to this goal and an individual is free to choose the paths most suitable for him/her. Puja involves ritual and sacrifice as derived from the Vedic heritage; bhakti is the path of passionate devotion practiced with song and prayer; dhyana (meditation) and/or yoga are mental and physical practices to yoke the soul to god; dharma is the path of action following the religious rules; jnana, is the path of knowledge involving study of the scriptures, and darshana, or viewing, involves looking, contemplating and being receptive to the presence of the Divine.

Hinduism does not however, focus exclusively on that single goal, but recognizes that in this life there are also worldly needs to attend to. Hinduism observes four stages of life: student or apprentice, marriage and householder, hermit and wise guide, and renunciate. Each takes place in its own time and allows for both realistic, worldly endeavors and spiritual growth. It also recognizes four motivational states or objectives in life that need to be acknowledged: kama, pleasure and the senses; artha, the desire for wealth and prosperity; dharma, following religious and social laws; and moksha, the desire for release from the cycles of rebirth. Thus, Hinduism takes into consideration the natural needs and desires of earthly existence, while it also prepares for the ultimate goal or liberation. Pleasure, prosperity, and performance of duty are recognized drives that have their time and place in an individual's life, particularly for the householder, but they are maya (illusion) and are not to be clung to. This dual perspective allows Hindus to live and worship with enthusiasm and engagement while also pursuing the release from reincarnation. Hindus are ultimately not as concerned with the life they are in as with the life inside them.

## Hinduism and the Arts

How does Hinduism affect the arts? As Hindu culture was religious, it follows that art will be essentially religious. The phenomenal world was seen as illusion; Hindu artists were therefore not motivated by trying to recreate these forms naturalistically. They never developed rules of perspective or natural proportion, and artists were unconcerned with anatomical correctness, or fidelity in coloration. The rules followed came from religious texts, which presented an idealistic and iconographic canon or set of principles for artists to follow.

Historically, throughout the Brahmanical period the religious life focused on recitation of texts and the performance of rituals by the brahmins, or priests, and no images appear to have been created. From the earlier, Harappan culture we find a few small images and seals that probably reflect religious ideas and may have served the religion at that time. Not until the time when Indians were seeking reform of the rigid practices of Brahmanism and the development of separate heterodox religions, does major imagery begin to appear. (Of course, there is always the possibility that religious art was being produced in perishable materials and that what we have from ancient times is always only a fragment of the artistic production of a given period.) Ideas included in the Upanishads were finding form in these new religions, including the notions of the yogic joining of the soul with the Divine in the formulation of Brahman = atman. This concept may be an idea preserved by local religious practices descended from the ancient Harappan culture, as we see the re-emergence of symbolic images of figures in meditation and later also of combined animal or human and animal figures.

The earliest images serve the Buddhist and Jain faiths and date from the fourth century BCE about a century and a half after their formulations; the earliest Hindu sculpture appears a little more than a century later. Peripheral images, those outside the specific needs of the Buddhist or Jain ideals, include animals, nature gods, and goddesses. Figures are substantial and clad from the waist down in light weight dhotis for male images and “skirts” for the female ones. They are bedecked with jewelry from head to toe, and often wear elaborate headgear. Ideas of hierarchy are suggested by some attendant type figures and also separate primary deities. Figures hold attributes, symbolic objects, in their hands that indicate their status and activity. Richness and abundance are joyously celebrated. Some human and especially animal figures exhibit sensitive modeling and naturalism at this early stage, while others are already more iconographic in feeling.

By the fifth century CE Hindu iconography had developed to show deities not only in hierarchical arrangements, with larger primary deities and smaller attendant figures, but also with more symbolic forms such as composite images and figures with multiple arms and/or heads, standing on supporting figures. There are symbolic postures (asanas) and hand gestures (mudras) and an expanded array of attributes. The accomplished integration of these symbolic forms indicates the maturing of the religious imagery designed to serve the complex philosophies and doctrines of Hinduism. The manipulated human form provides the metaphor for all aspects of the activities of God in the universe.

The importance of animal imagery should not be minimized. Animals appear with all the gods and as gods themselves. Hinduism has deep respect for all life, and animals in particular are cherished, such



as the sacred cows that cannot be killed. They carry the intuitive potentialities that humans need for wholeness. The vahanas, or vehicles of the gods, provide a kind of natural wisdom for the god, who exists on a plain of more abstract thought. The magnificence, intelligence, and power of the elephant was undeniable to the Indian. It appears in the earliest imagery from Harappa and was also included in the pantheon of the sky gods of the Vedic world as the vehicle of Indra, king of the gods. His wisdom undeniable, he re-emerges as the elephant-headed Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles (see slide 4). Vishnu, the Preserver of the Hindu Trinity, had been a Vedic sky god. His vehicle, Garuda, the eagle or sun-bird, carries the wisdom of the light of consciousness and the far sight of this high flier (see slide 19). The Goddess rides the grandly graceful, sensual, and potentially ferocious lion or tiger, a fitting symbol for the divine female and a powerful companion (see slide 6). Although there are many more, Hanuman, especially, should not be overlooked (see slides 6, 19 and 20). This strong, resourceful, even mischievous monkey, general of the monkey army that aided Rama in his great battle with Ravana, symbolizes one of the most important values of Hinduism, the gift of loyalty and service, the archetypal symbol of following one's dharma. The inclusion of these animals in Hindu sculpture is a crucial part of the message of the image.

Individual images may be read as separate statements or as part of complex groupings of ideas. Sophisticated arrangements of images, first seen in rock cut cave temples of the fifth century, and later in large complexes of temple buildings, present in stone the philosophical ideas found in the scriptures, especially the Upanishads. By their arrangement we can see that circumambulation (walking around) a structure was practiced as part of worship, as was a prescribed way of entering into the temple. The sculpture was arranged to provide the experience of a religious progression. For instance images of Ganesha, the elephant-headed god, the Lord of Beginnings (see slides 4), appears near the entrance or at the start of the circumambulation path, and Durga, (see slides 6 and 10) the Victorious slayer of the Buffalo Demon, symbol of death, may be opposite it or at the end.<sup>5</sup> An image may be read on many levels, as are the Sanskrit texts themselves, to accommodate the level of knowledge or needs of the devotee or patron. It may be read as a narrative, a reminder of the essence of a deity, a symbolic representation of spiritual progress, or even as a political statement about the patron who had the image or complex made. Viewers at different stages of the path are able to approach the image in ways appropriate and meaningful to them.

A rich variety of forms and images developed over time to represent the depth and complexity of the religion. In reading these we look at the principle image, observing the stance or pose, appearance, gestures, attributes, and accompanying figures to appreciate the representation of an aspect of god. For instance, in the Shiva Nataraja (see slide 2), the primary symbol is Shiva, the Destroyer in the Hindu Trinity. Supporting attributes are found in his hands and by mudras, the figure he stands on, and the symbols found in his hair and on his body. All of these spell out the aspects of the story.

The standing figure of Vishnu (see slide 3) symbolizes the god who is the protector and preserver of order and balance in the universe. In this image he stands in a static frontal pose, representing the most essential, true, and luminous quality of matter. His potential for action is symbolized by the weapons and his connection to the devotee by his hand in the mudra of gift giving. His power and majesty is represented by his crown and jewels and his awesome presence, towering over his two consorts, goddesses in their own right. The richness of detail and the charm of the heavenly goddesses lure the viewers into connection with the Divine, so the profound philosophical ideas may subtly penetrate

their being.

## Hindu Worship

Why were these images created? What was their function? The multiplicity of forms of God provide the Hindu worshipper with points of focus to contact the divine in any one of its many aspects. Images were made as reminders, for contemplation, and as embodiments or vessels that can contain the god when invoked. They were made for temple and home use. Temples frequently massive stone structures, contain a small inner chamber, sometimes referred to as a cave or womb, with the most sacred image or images inside, surmounted by a massive mountain-like tower.



Here puja, or worship, is performed on a regular basis by a priest or priests. Images are bathed, anointed, dressed and/or bedecked with flowers every day. Offerings are made several times a day and hymns are sung in the god's praise (see slides 11 and 12). Individuals may attend these regular period of worship or may come to worship on their own between times. On special occasions or at times of personal need, an individual or family might engage the priest to say prayers and give offerings in their name. Or he might be asked to perform a special ceremony such as a marriage (see slide13). There are no congregational services within the temple; however, at festival times the community gathers in the temple compound for special ceremonies.

Visits to the temple engage the devotee with a number of deities. As they circumambulate the holy structure they can see and contemplate numerous sculpted images of different aspects or activities of the principal and subsidiary gods and of heavenly beings. On entering the temple they are apt to first encounter an image of Ganesha, Remover of Obstacles and Lord of Beginnings. At a Shiva temple they will likely see a statue of Nandi, the bull and Shiva's vahana, his vehicle or mount, placed outside the main shrine, but sometimes in a small building of his own, facing the Shiva linga, the most holy and symbolic type of Shiva image, the one that occupies the inner chamber of the temple (see Shiva Linga). Prayers and offerings may also be made to any of these images, especially Ganesha.

There is a great variety in Hindu imagery. Particular forms of the gods have been formulated for worship by the different sects of Hinduism, as well as for regional preferences. Hindu sects are not rigid divisions, as all the gods may be worshipped by a Hindu devotee. However, some regions and temples may show a preponderance of temples built honoring Shiva, Vishnu, or the Goddess. In South India, where Shiva worship is especially popular, many temples, and therefore many images, are devoted to this god. There are stone temples bearing stone sculptures of many aspects of the god on the exterior, and the Shiva linga inside. Bronze devotional images may be housed in the temple and paraded around it on special festival occasions (see slide 2). Vishnu is worshipped throughout the country in a number of different forms representing the god in his primary manifestation (see slide3) and also in the multiple forms of his nine incarnations (see slides 7, 8, 9, and 13-20 for paintings of some of these incarnations and the handouts *Introducing Hindu Deities* and *What is India?*).

Another important form of worship, that is engaged in when visiting a temple or also when going to see a wise teacher, is darshana. Darshana means "viewing" and implies to truly seeing an image or

person, and a recognition of presence of the god. Darshana is said to bring merit to the viewer and to absorb negative karma. When there is a profound connection, darshana can effect a transformation. In this form of worship, imagery has a special significance. As remarked by art historian Susan Huntington, “Indeed the emphasis on darshana (viewing) on the Indic culture . . . has lent the visual arts an importance never exceeded elsewhere in the world.”<sup>6</sup>

Besides the imagery made for temple use, smaller images of stone or metal were produced for home altars (see slides 9, 10, and 11). Poster images of the gods also find a place on personal altars, as well as in shops and on buses. Every morning and evening, and sometimes more often during the day, puja will be performed at these altars. In some households images have whole wardrobes of garments and little beds for taking care of the god. The woman’s role in the care of the deity and the offerings is very important. Women cook for the gods as they cook for their family. This may be understood on two levels; first that they prepare food to offer on the altar while they are cooking for their family, and second that they are cooking for the divine, the atman, that dwells in every human being. Thus kitchens, no matter how humble, are kept spotlessly clean and pure. Food that is offered to the gods is later consumed by the family as prasad, blessed food.

## Hindu Miniature Painting

So far we have been talking of sculpted images. What of the paintings of the gods? What was their purpose? Not all paintings have the iconic purpose of sculpture. For the most part those that do are wall paintings found in cave temples built in the fifth to ninth centuries and monumental temples of the later medieval periods. There appears to be no direct relationship, however, between these wall painting and the miniature painting traditions. Indian book painting began with iconographic illustrations in the long, narrow format of the palm-leaf holy books, produced for the Buddhist and Jain religions between the ca. eighth-twelfth centuries and twelfth-sixteenth centuries respectively. The modest images were large in scale, and strong in gesture. There was little in the way of setting as the figures stood out against a solid background, most often red. This bold, expressive style was adopted with modifications by other schools of Indian painting, where the images were still of religious stories and images, but not for texts used for worship (see Pahari Painting). The vast number of book illustrations have been produced for personal use, for education and enjoyment.

The introduction of Persian illustrated secular books in the early sixteenth century, by Islamic conquerors from the inspired a wider range of book illustration in India. The vertical format also suited religious Hindu literature. It provided a medium for the illustration of tales of the gods that are found in the great epics, myths and verse. The pictures are small and, as they were originally contained in books, were enjoyed by only one or a few viewers at a time. The early Indian style is bold to suit its purpose of capturing the emotional attention of the viewer (slides 5, 14, 15, 18, and 19). Artists use bright and also deep earthy mineral and vegetable colors. The background is usually solid color or nearly so. Very high horizons may appear as a narrow band of blue with white clouds at the top, so one’s attention remains on the story in the foreground. Those more influenced by Persian style are rich with decorative detail, rewarding slow and concentrated viewing. With the weakening of the Mughal empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, court artists dispersed and the influence from the more

naturalistic Mughal court style, penetrated outlying areas. This resulted in the formation of the of new styles in the Pahari region. The Kangra style with its suave line and pastel colors, used the illusionist possibilities of the Mughal style to create poetic, mysterious and even magical images (slides 16, 17, and 20).

## Summary

In celebration of India's hard won freedom to chart its own course, we offer this packet that has had as a goal to explore the ancient roots and lasting inspiration of Hindu culture. By briefly reviewing Indian history of the 400 years previous to independence, we can gain a perspective on the energies aroused in the separation process and long-buried longings of the Hindu soul. In the spirit of the exhibition, India: A Celebration! we have presented the art with an emphasis on the role it plays in the culture. Reflecting on the origins of the culture, as they have been preserved through archaeological remains and precisely transmitted texts, we can begin to understand the multiple strands of religious and philosophical experience that are embedded in its artistic production. Looking at Hinduism and the many of the ways and levels of worship, we can begin to appreciate the art as part of a diverse and living religious impulse. It would take a life-long study, maybe of many lifetimes, to fully grasp the depth, richness, and complexity of this glorious tradition, which is both past and present, both spiritual and pragmatic, and speaks so eloquently of the One and the many.

1 Quoted in W. H. Moreland., *From Akbar to Aurangzeb* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923) p. 53.

2 Quoted in T. Walter Wallbank, *India in the New Era* (Chicago, et. al.: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1951), p.82.

3 Quoted in T. Walter Wallbank, *India in the New Era* (Chicago: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1951), p.143. Eve Curie, *Journey Among Warriors* (New Delhi: Doubleday, Doran, 1943), p. 462.

4 David Frawley, *Gods, Sages and Kings: Vedic Secrets of Ancient Civilization* (Passage Press, 1991)

5 Susan Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*. (New York, Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985) pp. 190-191.

6 Susan Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India*. (New York, Tokyo: Weatherhill, 1985) p. xxvi

## Slide Introduction

These slides are of images displayed in the exhibition *India: A Celebration!* held at the Asian Art Museum from June through September 1997. They reflect many aspects of Indian Hindu culture. The three groups of slides present (1) Sculpture and painting depicting Hindu gods and goddesses, (2) Hindu worship or puja, with a sample altar, smaller images, and the act of worship, and (3) painted illustrations from the Hindu epic, the Ramayana. The selection of twenty slides provides material to discuss not only traditional imagery of the Hindu religions, constructed from a variety of materials, but also their continuing function in Hindu life. Many of the images in the various media present examples of the rich mythology of India. Stories provide early education in the Hindu religion and reinforce the values of the culture for Indians of all ages.

Teachers may also rearrange the slides to talk about the stylistic development of Pahari painting. In this regard we wish to thank Dr. Joanna Williams and her graduate seminar for the research on these paintings and for the use in this text of their wall panel and labels copy. Small modifications and additions have been made to these texts to conform to the order and use of the images selected for this packet.

The museum is also very grateful to the various lenders to the exhibition for permission to share slides of their images. It gives us the opportunity to enrich the stock of materials we can help you share with your students. For more information about Indian art and culture, please refer to the following materials available in the resource center:

### Slide Packets

Beliefs Made Visible: Buddhist and Hindu Images in Asian Art  
Illustration and Illumination: Indian Miniature Paintings  
Mythic Impulse: Gods and Animals in Indian Art  
Unity and Diversity in the Art of India

### Videos

Beliefs Made Visible: Hindu and Buddhist Arts of India  
Puja: Aspects of Hindu Devotion  
Asian Art Museum Gallery Videos

## Slide 1



Adoration of Saraswati  
Gouache on paper  
Chamba, ca. 1800  
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco  
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts  
Gift of Paul Wonner

What do you notice about these figures?  
How are they different from one another?  
How are they different from ordinary human beings?  
What kind of beings might they be?  
What are they doing?  
Which one is most important?  
How do you know?

In this small painting we meet the five principle gods of the Hindu Pantheon. Pictured is the Trimurti or trinity, the three forms of the One Supreme God: Brahma, the Creator; Vishnu, the Preserver; and Shiva, the Destroyer. Joining them are the Goddess Saraswati, and the elephant-headed god, Ganesha.

**Saraswati** is the Goddess of Wisdom, Music, and Literature. She is the consort of Brahma and, like him, often carries a book and prayer beads, but her primary attribute is the vina, a stringed musical instrument. She may also be found as the second consort of Vishnu. Here she has been elevated to the status of Devi Mahatmya, the Supreme Goddess, worshipped by the Trimurti themselves.

**Brahma** can be recognized by his four heads which allow him to see in all directions and by the priestly attributes he carries: the book of holy scriptures, a libation spoon, prayer beads, and a jar of holy water.

**Vishnu**, a kingly god, is blue, or dark in complexion, and wears a crown. In this image he is not shown with his various attributes.

**Shiva** is white because he is shown in his ascetic aspect in which he covers himself with ashes. He wears the skin of a wild animal, a necklace of skulls, and a snake wrapped around his body. The crescent moon is in his matted and piled up hair. He carries his attribute, the trident, or three-pronged weapon.

Behind Saraswati stands the beloved elephant-headed god, Ganesha, God of Beginnings and Remover (or bringer) of Obstacles.

The title of this picture is the *Adoration of Saraswati* or *Homage to the Goddess*. In it Saraswati stands out as pristine, fully painted yet devoid of color. This is surely the first page of a manuscript, for the goddess is flanked by the elephant-headed Ganesha, God of Beginnings. Squat figures with large heads are characteristic of painting in Chamba, one of the Pahari kingdoms in the foothills of the Himalayas. Thus even such late, accomplished figures have a folkish simplicity.

## Slide 2



Vishnu  
Schist  
Pala period, early 11th century  
Bangladesh  
B60 S48+  
The Avery Brundage Collection

If this image were a painting, the central figure would be painted blue.

Who would that be?

What is he wearing?

How many arms does he have?

What do you notice about the other figures?

Who is most important here?

Can you identify one of these female goddesses? Look for the vina.

Vishnu, the Preserver, is one of the Trimurti. Like a king who preserves the welfare of his people and the order of his kingdom, Vishnu wears a crown, jewelry, and a fine silk cloth wrapped around his lower body. His attributes include some of the implements of warfare used in ancient India: the club or mace, the discus, and the conch shell horn. His fourth hand holds a lotus seed and displays the gesture of charity. A small image of his *vahana*, or vehicle, the bird-man Garuda, is seen with his hands in adoration on the pedestal to the right.

The god is shown standing in a stiff, columnar pose. It is not an image of the god in action, but one showing just who he is. The two goddesses who flank him are shown in a triple bend pose, legs and hips angling to one side, the torso to the other, and the neck and head tilting back to center. The goddesses are gently active. The feminine principle (*shakti*) is considered to be the energizer or activator of the male. In this aspect they are the consorts of the gods. Vishnu's primary consort is Lakshmi, who stands to his right holding a fly whisk. She is the goddess of good fortune, prosperity, and the fertility of the land (especially rice growing), and is also the bringer of happiness, grace, and beauty. As Brahma is less often represented, his consort Saraswati became attached to Vishnu. Can you recognize her with her *vina*?



### Slide 3



Shiva Nataraja, or Lord of the Dance  
Bronze  
Tamil Nadu, 12th century  
Collection of Robert Ellsworth

There are two details in this image that can help you identify this god with one of the gods shown in the first painting.

Can you find them?

One, a small one, can be found in his crown (the crescent moon) and the other wrapped around his neck and arm (the snake). This is an image of Shiva, the Destroyer in the Hindu Trimurti.

Does he look destructive?

What is he doing?

He has a small hand-drum in his right hand. Imagine how it would sound.

Shiva, is represented here in his balanced form of destroyer and creator. Hindus believe that time is cyclical and that destruction and creation are part of a continuous cycle. In this form, Shiva represents the activity of God, balancing the energies of creation, preservation, and reabsorption of the cosmos. "His form is everywhere. . . everywhere His dance. As Shiva is all and omnipresent, Everywhere is Shiva's gracious dance made manifest" (from Tirumular's Tirumantram, quoted in Coomarswami, 88).

His hands and feet tell us many things; they are a language. In his outstretched left hand he holds the fire of destruction and purification. This is balanced by the hourglass-shaped drum, beating out the rhythm of creation, held in the outstretched right hand. The other right hand is held palm outward with the fingers up in the gesture, or mudra, of reassurance. The inner left hand points down at the foot raised in dance. The raised foot in turn indicates release from time-worn ways and liberation from the continuous cycle of birth, death, and rebirth or reincarnation. The small, crouching figure he stands on represents ignorance, that is ignorance of the spiritual nature of the world (see Appendix A

for a drawing and identification of this image).

## **Story**

In Shiva's hair, can you find the figure of a woman with her hands held up in adoration? She is Ganga, the holy Ganges River. At a time when the land was in a terrible state of draught, the people prayed for water, and Ganga was persuaded to descend from the heavens. But, the force of her fall would be so great that if she fell directly the earth might split apart. The great god Shiva volunteered to catch her as she descended through his mountain home in the Himalayas. From there Ganga's waters divided in his matted hair to create the seven rivers that come together to form the Ganges. In this image, Shiva's hair flying in the energy of the dance resembles the waves of flowing water.

## Slide 4



Ganesha  
Chloritic Schist  
Hoysala period, 13th century  
Mysore, India  
B68S4  
The Avery Brundage Collection

You've seen this god before.

What is most distinctive about him?

Do you recognize the elephant-headed god, Ganesha?

How many hands does he have?

What is Ganesha's trunk doing? (Hint: how do elephants eat?)

What sort of a deity does he look like to you? Does he seem friendly?

What would you ask of him?

Ganesha is probably the most popular deity in India. He is worshipped not only by Hindus but by people of other faiths as well, such as Jains and Sikhs. As the Lord of Obstacles, he mostly removes them, but may also produce them. Students ask him to help them do well in their studies and merchants pray to him to bring good luck to their business. (If a business goes bankrupt, the proprietor displays a picture of Ganesha upside down.) Ganesha is also known as the Lord of Beginnings and is invoked at the beginning of many activities, especially the beginning of prayers. His image is placed on most home altars and just inside the entrance of temples.

### Story of Ganesha

There are many stories of the origin of Ganesha, who is a son of Shiva and his wife Parvati. The most common one tells that Parvati was lonely as Shiva often went off the mountains to meditate by himself. One day she decided to create a child out of clay and the scrapings of her body. He was a charming young boy and brought her much happiness. One day when Parvati had stationed him outside her bath to protect her privacy, Shiva came home and demanded that the boy step aside to let

him in. The boy refused because he did not know who Shiva was, and Parvati had told him not to let anyone disturb her. Shiva got very angry and cut off the boy's head. Poor Parvati was so distraught when she saw what Shiva had done to her child that Shiva promised to get a new head for the boy. An elephant was found and its head placed on the boy's body, bringing him back to life. Parvati was delighted with his new form and that the child now belonged to both of them.

The elephant head gave Ganesha a special kind of wisdom. Elephants were much revered in ancient India as well as today. They are impressive, intelligent, long-lived animals, that can be trained to be very helpful to men. Airavata, the elephant mount or vehicle of Indra, the Vedic King of the Gods, was associated with the clouds and rain, bringing life to earth from the heavens. Elephants are also found in art bathing the goddess with water from a lotus pond, in an act of reverence and purification.

The name Ganesha means lord (ishvara) of the Ganas. Ganas are different kinds of demi-gods who had been worshipped since ancient times and have become Shiva's attendants (see Appendix B for drawing).

## Slide 5



Shiva Slays the Demon of the Three Cities  
Gouache on paper  
Mandi, ca. 1725  
Collection of Carol Summers

There are lots of strange and magical things happening in this picture.

What gods do you recognize?

What symbols and attributes do you notice?

Who do you think is the most important god here?

What is magical about the chariot? Look at the wheels.

What is going on? Who do the gods seem to be pursuing? Describe the demon.

Here Shiva is shown in his ascetic aspect where he practices austere self discipline in order to heighten spiritual powers. He wears a leopard skin and a garland of skulls, a snake is wrapped around his body, and his upswept, matted hair supports a crescent moon. He rides a chariot with the moon and sun as its wheels, Brahma, the Creator, serving as his charioteer. Shiva is armed with an arrow whose steel head was the fire god, as he must incinerate three upstart demons living in magic cities (Tripuras), invulnerable to men. This demon appears mainly as a bird, its feathers formed by hills circling a village scene within its body. The early Pahari style creates an image of a gleefully ferocious monster in cosmic struggle.

### Story

This painting illustrates the story of one of Shiva's actions to help rid the world of evil. There was a demon called Tripura, who really represented a collection of three magical cities of lesser demons who, by prayer and penances had received boons from Brahma. One of the cities was made of gold, one of silver, and one of iron. They were all heavily fortified and impregnable by humans and most of the gods. As usual the demons were disturbing the peace and welfare of the people, interrupting rituals and disrupting the activities of the gods. In desperation the gods called on Brahma for help, but it was Brahma who had answered the prayers of the demons. (Often in Hindu stories the demons get their power from practicing austerities and praying to the gods who are then bound to give them special boons.) The gods knew that only Shiva would be able to destroy the demons and only under special circumstances, by the use of a single arrow piercing all three at one time. These cities moved about

like planets in the sky and only after 1000 years would all three be brought together. As this time was drawing near, the gods begged Shiva to help. He agreed but only if they would all give him some of their power and also help him. They did so and when the moment arrived Shiva, standing in a chariot driven by Brahma, pulled his gigantic bow sent the arrow, whose tip was the god of fire, through the three cities. Tripura went down in flames.

How has the artist decided to illustrate the story?

Where are the three cities?

What kinds of creatures has the artist put together to create the demon? See Appendix C for a drawing of a relief sculpture illustrating the story.

How is it different from the painting?

What has the artist chosen to emphasize?

How does he show the three cities?

Which illustration do you like better? How would you illustrate the story? Sculpture was often painted in India. Perhaps you would like to color this drawing or create an illustration of your own.

## Slide 6



Durga Killing the Buffalo Demon  
Gouache on paper  
Mandi, ca. 1750  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco  
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts  
Gift of William Theophilus Brown. 1984.2.53

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This goddess carries weapons of the principal gods in her multiple arms. Can you find the conch shell and discus of Vishnu and the trident of Shiva? What other emblem of Shiva is she wearing? (The crescent moon in her headdress.) What animal is she riding? All the Hindu gods have vehicles, or vahanas, that they ride or that just accompany them. The vahana of the Goddess Durga is the lion (or sometimes tiger), graceful and softly sensuous, but with the potential to be ferocious. What animal is she conquering?

This is Durga, the Goddess powerful in her own right. She is not a consort to any of the gods, but combines the strength of all of them. When a demon in the form of a buffalo was devastating the earth, the helpless gods pooled their energies from which sprang the Terrifying Goddess, Durga. Each god gave her a weapon; for instance, Vishnu gave his discus seen on the left, and Shiva gave his trident which is plunged into the dying demon. Such iconography is common throughout India, but the presence of a docile monkey attendant (Rama's devotee Hanuman?) is unusual yet appropriate as another loan from the male gods.

The quiet mood and stiff movement of all the actors are characteristic of Mandi. As in some other pictures from that state, large areas of paper are left almost unpainted, focusing on the figures. Durga's face is placid and her victory seems effortless. Only the tiger with his riveting eyes seems to embody her wrath.

## Slide 7



Matsya, the Fish Incarnation of Vishnu  
Gouache on paper  
Guler, ca. 1795, attributed to Sanju  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

Vishnu, the preserver of the world, takes form on earth to restore order and goodness when the forces of evil become overpowering. There have been nine of these incarnations, which are called avatars; some have been animal, some have been human. Hindus believe at some future time Vishnu will descend again, when the spirit of good has been overwhelmed by the power of evil.

This is the earliest of Vishnu's avatars.  
Can you find Vishnu? What animal is he connected with?  
Where is the action taking place?  
Where is the demon? Who else is in the picture?  
What seems to be going on here?

### Story

Hindu mythology describes a great flood in primordial time. Manu, the ancestor of the human race, salvaged the seeds of all creation. Along with seven sages, Manu navigated the deluge in a raft. Vishnu took the form of a great fish to rescue them and destroyed the horse-headed demon (Hayagriva), who had stolen the four Vedas (sacred texts) and who here lies submerged with his broken sword and shield. The fish sprouted a horn at the climatic moment, and the King of Serpents served as a rope to tow the sages' raft. Vishnu emerged in human form, holding the four volumes of the Vedas, with his conch and lotus tucked into his belt.

The artist Sajnu was not descended from Manaku, one of the area's most famous artists, but was contemporary with his grandchildren. He delights in depicting illusionistic forms seen through fine washes of water. Notice how he depicts water and shows the demon sinking beneath the surface.



## Slide 8

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Varaha, The Boar Incarnation of Vishnu Battles  
Hiranyaksha From the Bhagavata Purana  
Gouache on paper  
Guler, ca 1740, possibly by Manaku  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

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How can you tell that this is another incarnation of Vishnu?  
What weapons (attributes) does he hold?  
What kind of animal form has he assumed?  
What do you think of this demon?  
Does he look strong and fierce?  
Who do you think is going to win the battle?

In his third incarnation, Vishnu must conquer a demon that lives in the ocean; hence he takes the form of a boar, a strong animal that can swim. The boar can also find things by smell and thus root out where the earth has been hidden beneath the water. Varaha's attributes -- club, discus, lotus, and conch -- outnumber the demon's. Yet to judge from the rivers of blood, the opponents are well-matched. The turbulent swirls of water in the background add to the vigorous drama.

Taken alone, this spectacular page might seem to be an accomplished Basholi work. But it belongs to a series, linked to other drawings and ultimately to the work of Manaku.

The museum has a sculpture of this form of Vishnu that illustrates Vishnu rescuing mother earth. Before he battled the demon he had sniffed her out and lifted her above the water on his tusk. (See Appendix D for a drawing and text of that part of the story.)

## Slide 9



Krishna as Venu Gopala (the Flute-playing Cowherd)  
Brass  
Sixteenth-seventeenth century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum 88.493

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This is also an image of an incarnation of Vishnu.

How is it different from the one you just saw? What do you notice about it?

Could you identify this as a form of Vishnu? Why not?

What do you think he might be holding in his hands? (Hint: it is not any kind of weapon, but rather a musical instrument.)

What sort of mood does this image create?

In the form of Krishna, the eighth avatar, Vishnu came to earth in the form of a human being. Here he is shown as the young flute-playing cowherd. He wears a short, patterned dhoti, jewelry, and wooden sandals. His long hair is tied up in a series of neat buns. It is his pose and the invisible attribute of the flute that tell us this is Krishna. He stands in the gently active, tribhanga pose. Tribhanga means “three bends.” In this graceful and balanced stance, the knee bends, the hip projects, and the head tilts. It gives a gentle sense of movement and grace to the figure. Krishna’s relaxed leg crosses over the weight bearing one and the toes gently touch the ground.

Although ultimately he was born to conquer an evil ruler, his uncle Kamsa, most of the stories of Krishna tell of his life from infancy to adolescence, and portray him as a playful, charming, and brave little child. Here he is shown as one of the youthful cowherds in the village where he grew up and was admired and beloved by his fellow cowherds. His flute playing lured the young and even the married women out of their homes to join him in the forest. This aspect of Krishna represents the longing of the human soul for union with the divine. It is the foundation of bhakti, or devotion, one of the ways of reaching the ultimate goal of Hinduism, that of liberation or release from the cycles of rebirth. Others paths are spiritual knowledge gained through study of the scriptures and the path of selfless work, working unselfishly for the good of society.

Small images like this are made for use on home altars where they are used as objects of daily worship. The god would be bathed, dressed, and bedecked in the morning like a special member of the household. He would be adorned with garlands of flowers and given the morning food first. After the morning puja, or ritual worship, the prasad, or the part of the food not consumed by the god, is eaten by the family.

## Slide 10



Durga Slaying the Buffalo Demon  
Brass with cloth garments  
18th-19th century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum 88.483

Do you recognize any of the images here?

Who have you seen that is most like the central figure? (Hint: it is a goddess.)

How can you tell that this is a powerful goddess?

What weapons should she be holding in her two principle hands?

Who is that sitting on the right?

This brass sculpture, like the previous one, is of modest size for use on a home altar. Her red garment and halo of hands grasping invisible weapons give this small figure a sense of passionate energy. The garment would be placed on her as part of the morning puja, or ritual worship, after she had been bathed. Only after being so tenderly taken care of will the gods be disposed to answer the prayers of the devotee.

Below her on the right is the demon Mahisha who is emerging from the neck of a barely visible buffalo body. Look for the buffalo head on the ground beneath the buffalo. A very stylized lion beneath the goddess's right foot bites the demon's arm and claws his torso. This lion is her vehicle. This goddess is a form of Devi, the Great Goddess, who embraces many aspects of divine energy. As Durga, she is the powerful warrior goddess who can destroy demons. As Parvati or Uma, she is the sweet, loving wife of Shiva; and in her most ferocious form she is Kali goddess of death and destruction.

Her children are the elephant-headed Ganesha and the young warrior god, Karttikeya, who rides a peacock. The two goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati serve as her attendants.

## Slide 11



### Altar

Arranged by Dhriti Bagchi with assistance of Sanjiban Guba for The Newark Museum including:

1. Shrine with Krishna and Radha  
Brass, 19th -20th century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1987-1988  
The Newark Museum, 87.186, .187; 88.480

2. Plate and Bowl  
Bell-metal  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum, 88.511, .526

3. Plate  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum, 88.523, .525

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There are lots of things to notice in this picture of a type of home altar.

Where is the principle object of worship?

Why can't you see the image? (It is dressed and garlanded so only the heads peek above the flowers. The image is actually a dual one of Krishna and his favorite milkmaid, Radha)

What can you identify on this altar?

Look for these things: items of food, banana-leaf plates, flower or paper garlands, more sculptural images and pictures of gods, a conch shell horn, a bell and cymbals, a book of prayers, a prayer shawl to wear when praying, an oil lamp, packets of incense, a doll-like bed with mosquito netting, decorative floor or table patterns, water containers.

A Hindu altar is a richly complex and sensual display. Many home altars are much smaller than this and contain fewer things, but some types of objects are always found. The usual utensils used in ritual worship consist of a bell or cymbals to invoke the god. Incense holders, water vessels, and sandalwood grinders are also found. Offerings include flowers (often in garlands) and food.

Imagine the sounds and fragrant smells that are produced for worship of the gods. Pujas take place every morning and evening and, in especially devout households, two more times during the day. The

household altars are usually attended by the mistress of the home. In this environment women are freely able to express their religious sentiments without the aid of a priest. Some women spend loving time making special clothes for the deity, fixing his or her bed, and decorating the altar. The white patterns found on the altar help define the sacred space and surround some of the ritual objects. They are created daily with wetted rice flour and are also made for special occasions. The gods are attracted to them and descend to partake of the offerings and give their blessings to the family. Although these alpana patterns were made by Bengali women, such sacred drawings are created all over India where they are known by different names: mandna in Rajasthan, rangoli in Gujarat, and kolam in Tamil Nadu, for example. They display a rich variety of designs.

**Slide 12**

Worship of the linga  
 Mahakala Temple, Ujjain, M.P.  
 photo © Aditya Arya  
 Courtesy of The Asia Society

Worship in India is usually personal and individual except for special festival days. The gods in the temple are treated in a similar fashion by the priests as they are in home altars by family members. They are bathed, decorated, and fed offerings two to four times a day. Also, a single devotee or several people may engage a priest for services in a temple for prayers on important occasions.

This is a photograph of a priest performing one of the daily pujas to Shiva in a major temple. Before this point he has bathed and dressed in the simple yellow dhoti, a length of cloth wrapped around the waist and then pulled up between the legs and tucked in the back of the waist. He also wears the sacred thread across his torso, a symbol of his initiation into the religious community, after which he is considered to be twice born. This initiation is given to all boys of the three upper castes, as they begin their life as students at about 8 to 11 years old. First preparing himself by reciting mantras, sacred syllables, he bathes the image with water and then anoints it with the Five Ambrosias--milk, curds, clarified butter, sugar, and honey-- and then bathes it again in water. Dressing the linga includes marking it with lines of fragrant sandalwood paste and covering it with garlands of flowers, colored and scented powders, and sometimes precious ornaments. Having been so hospitably invoked, the god is believed to have entered the image and is offered uncooked food and spices for the morning puja and cooked food (usually) at noon. Lastly, the god is entertained with the waving of the lighted lamp, the ringing of a bell, and the chanting of mantras and singing of sacred songs. Here the puja is taking place in a temple. The priest is pouring libations over the Shiva linga which has been richly adorned with garlands of flowers. He is assisted by attendants. Devotees may come to pray and make offerings at any time during the day, including during puja. Sometimes they chant mantras or sing at appropriate moments. A devotee may also ask for special prayers to be said for special needs or to thank the god.

## Slide 13



The Marriage of Krishna and Rukmini  
Gouache on paper  
Guler, ca. 1750-1770, possibly by Nainsukh  
Asian Art Museum, B84 D8  
Gift of George Hopper Fitch

Priests perform rituals for special ceremonial occasions such as at the birth and naming of a baby, at marriage, and at death.

What do you think this ritual is about?

How many people do you see? (Hint: count the feet.) Who are they?

What seems to be going on?

Can you identify any of the ritual implements that you have seen before?

What is the important natural element (earth, air, fire, water) featured in this ritual?

This is a painting of the marriage of Krishna and Rukmini. Perhaps you guessed that the man is a form of Vishnu, because of his blue color. Although this picture was painted more than 200 years ago, it represents the Hindu marriage ceremony as it is still performed today, and was probably practiced for centuries before. Some of the important elements are the pavilion decorated with mango leaves that creates the sacred space, the central fire, and the apparent sharing or joining of the robes of the couple indicating their union. Infrared photography shows that Rukmini's face was originally drawn and then shrouded in red, as a traditional married woman would cover her face before men. Red is the color most used for marriage as it is the color of passion and life. (White is mostly reserved for funerals or for religious practitioners who have renounced the material world.) The couple sits with the veiled bride on the groom's right, facing the Brahmin priest, who holds a book of Vedic scriptures in his right hand. Before him are spread out the ritual objects: a spoon used to ladle ghee (the oil part of butter) onto the sacred fire, a water pot, a grinding stone, and the sacred fire. At one point during the ritual the couple will circumambulate, or walk around, the fire.

The dignified restraint of this picture and the subtle characterization of the slightly imperious priest are worthy of Manaku's younger brother, Nainsukh.



## The Ramayana

These next slides illustrate some episodes of the great Indian epic the Ramayana. The story recounts the life and exploits of Rama, the seventh avatar of Vishnu. Rama was born to rid the world of the demon Ravana of the island kingdom of Lanka (modern Sri Lanka). The greed and ruthlessness of Ravana and his family of demons had become so insufferable that men and gods had petitioned Vishnu to incarnate to restore the balance of good and evil. For the first time, Vishnu incarnated as an ordinary human being (who is perhaps based on an actual historical character), albeit with supernatural powers and strength. Rama is a model of the good king and proper Hindu, who selflessly follows his dharma, or moral and religious duty, and so doing brings peace and prosperity to his kingdom.

The paintings are from the northwestern hill states of India, designated as the Pahari region. They exhibit several different styles reflective of the dates and states in which they were painted. The pictures are arranged in accordance with the chronology of the story, not the art styles. All the paintings are in gouache on paper.

**Slide 14**

Vishvamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana Take Leave  
 Shrangri Ramayana, Book I  
 Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
 Collection of Carol Summers

This picture illustrates a scene early, but not at the beginning of the Ramayana story. King Dasaratha, who was long childless, has finally had sons by all of his three wives. The boys have been properly raised by their mothers and then educated by the guru Vasistha in both religious lore and the arts of warfare. His favorite son is Rama, born to his senior wife. Of the four boys, Rama and his slightly younger brother Lakshmana are constant companions.

The painting is one of a number of illustrations made for a large Ramayana project. At least two artists painted side by side on its early parts. Both work within the broad Basholi idiom of intense splendor. A masterful color palette had been embellished with touches of gold and bits of iridescent beetle shell. The tapestry of pattern in the foreground, with hints of space from a few diagonals, suggests a palace that is rich and strange.

**Story**

Let's get to know these boys as they will be our heroes. In this picture the brothers are seated on the left. You can tell Rama, because he, like other forms of Vishnu is blue. Both boys have as their attribute the bow, the principle weapon of the Kashatriya warrior caste at this time. The central figure is a sage, Visvamitra, who has come to ask King Dasaratha, on the right, for help in getting rid of the demons who are plaguing his ashram, by destroying the rituals and ceremonies necessary to communicate with the gods. The king is willing to send his army, but the sage wants Rama and Lakshmana to go with him. As a holy man he knows that Rama is the savior to be and that it is time for him to go out in the world and start practicing killing demons so that he will be prepared for the great battle with Ravana. Although the King is very reluctant to send these tender 15 year olds out to confront known demons, the sage prevails.

## Slide 15



Sita on Her Father's Lap Meets Emissaries from Ayodhya  
Shangri Ramayana, Book I  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

The gatekeeper is keeping the curious populace from entering the throne room of King Janaka.

Can you find seven figures inside the building?

Where are Rama and Lakshama?

What is going on inside?

### Story

After successfully killing the demons who were spoiling the sages' rituals, Rama and Lakshmana were introduced to a neighboring ruler, King Janaka, who had a beautiful, marriageable daughter, named Sita. Kings and princes from all around were vying for her hand in marriage, so King Janaka was inviting them all to come and take a test of strength in order to win her. Of course, young Rama was able to succeed where older seasoned warriors failed, and so he will marry the lovely Sita. On hearing more about Rama and his father and brothers, King Janaka is moved to marry his four daughters to the four brothers. Here he has Sita on his lap in preparation to giving her away to Rama, her husband to be. The women standing to the side may be some of King Janaka's other daughters. Outside, in the lower right rests the red palanquin that will carry the brides to Ayodhya. The drama of the scene is heightened by the intense exchange of glances among the attendants outside the palace.

The ground of flat, solid color, the division of the composition into two parts, and the reduction of elements to a few symbolically important stylistic choices meant to create an image that evokes the mood of the situation, rather than describing the scene in detail. The red background is symbolic of passion and is associated with love and romance. The figures are depicted with a simple boldness and utter disregard for natural proportion. The artist is interested in showing the essence of the story and the emotional quality of the event, not describing it realistically. Although the painting is small, it is monumental rather than miniature in concept.

## Slide 16



The Night Departure of Rama  
Ramayana, Book II  
Kangra, ca 1775-80  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

Where are these people? What time of day is it?  
What are most people doing? What else is happening?  
Can you find Rama?  
How is this painting style different from the previous one?  
Is it easier or more difficult to tell what is going on?  
Which style of painting do you like better? Why?

### Story

A little later in the story, after his sons have married, King Dasaratha decides to retire and put Rama on the throne. However, when the king's youngest wife hears this, she demands that the king honor an old promise to grant her two wishes, and now she wishes that he make her son Bharata king and that he banish Rama to the forest for fourteen years. Although it breaks his heart to do so, the King is bound by honor to grant her wishes. Rama, as the model of a dutiful son, agrees to go without complaint. His brother Lakshmana and bride Sita insist on going with him. The townspeople follow them in grief and disbelief. All stop by the River Tamas to spend the first night of exile. Awakening in the night, Rama is touched to see the loyalty of the sleeping townsfolk but does not want to burden them with his troubles. He orders the charioteer to harness the horses; then he, Sita, and Lakshmana ride off stealthily into the night.

With a soft palette of blues and grays, the artist captures the stillness and dim moonlit atmosphere of the scene. The nice thing about this painting is that the townsfolk are given center stage, the secrecy of the departure emphasized by the fact that it's taking place off in one corner. The people of Ayodhya sprawl prone, their shoes kicked off and clothes rumpled. They form a stark contrast to the figures in the chariot, dressed neatly in suits of leaves. All the townsfolk sleep deeply, and only a nocturnal jackal notices the departure.

Different painting styles developed in India expressing regional preferences and changes over time. One of the later styles to evolve in the Pahari region is the Kangra style, gently influenced by Mughal painting. The pictures are more naturalistic, displaying a greater depth of space, natural proportion, realistic details, and atmospheric effects.

## Slide 17



The Queens Visit Rama in Exile  
Ramayana Book II  
Kangra, ca. 1775-80  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

Where is Rama here?

Look at their house. Contrast their clothes with those of their visitors.

What kind of life are he and his companions living?

What other creatures live in the forest around them?

How would you feel if you were banished to such a life?

What would be most difficult? What would you miss most? What would you enjoy?

### Story

Rama's exile indeed does break the King's heart and he soon dies. After the death of King Dasaratha, his three widows travel into the forest to find Rama and ask him to assume kingship. They find him in a small hut on a river, in the foothills of Mt. Chitrakut. In this scene Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana respectfully greet the queens by bowing low and touching their feet. The forest dwellers blend into the idyllic landscape, emphasizing both their adaptation to exile and their state of poverty. The artist clearly delights in depicting the vegetation and wildlife: birds, deer, peacock, and a hare who stares straight out at the viewer.

Rama does not go back. Even though the king is dead, he feels he must fulfill his father's promise to his wife in order to uphold his honor. Even when Bharata begs Rama to return and rule as king, Rama refuses. Bharata does not want to take the throne from Rama, and says he will only rule in Rama's name. He takes Rama's wooden sandals to place on the throne until Rama returns to sit on it himself.

Do you think this is the right choice? What would you do in under these circumstances?

## Slide 18



Rama Confronts Khara and His Demon Troops  
Shangri Ramayana, Book III  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Carol Summers

What do you see here?

Where is Rama? How do you know?

Who is he turning to talk to? What might he be saying? (Don't worry, I'll be fine?)

How are Sita and Lakshmana feeling? If they talked what might they say?

What do you think will happen next?

Will Rama be victorious?

Find Khara, the donkey-headed demon.

Do you think the artist had fun drawing demons? Do they look fierce to you? How would you draw demons, the powers of evil?

### Story

The exiled Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana settle in the forest and the secluded land of Panchavati. The demoness Srupanakha falls in love with Rama and tries to seduce him but is rejected and her nose is cut off by Lakshmana. She turns to her brother, the donkey-headed Khara, for vengeance. Here Rama, dressed in armor, bids farewell to his wife and brother and seems to walk obliviously toward the demon army (which he will, of course, conquer).

This painter, who worked primarily on volume III of the Shangri set, tones down the background yellow and creates a stable, grassy foreground on which some figures stand. Rama's heroic stature is suggested by his isolation in the picture compared to the densely packed army of Khara. Yet the crowd of demons is berserk with Basholi frenzy.

This story is full of magical happenings. Remember, Rama is a god -- in human form -- and thus has superhuman abilities, even though he doesn't show them. He will conquer these demons. The text says: "Then in battle, Rama killed all the rakshasas (demons), Khara and Dooshana, and their followers who had attacked him at Srupanakha's word," and "Living in the (Dandakaranya) forest, Rama single-handedly killed fourteen thousand rakshasas."

## Slide 19



The Garuda Bird Returns Rama and  
Lakshmana to the Monkeys  
Shangri Ramayana Book VI  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Charles and Glenna Campbell

Can you find Rama and his companions here? Who is missing? Who else is present?

Here are Rama and Lakshmana with a different set of characters.

Do they look fierce or friendly?

What kinds of animals can you find?

How has the artist indicated that some are more important than others?

Sita is missing. She has been abducted by the demon Ravana, partly in revenge for the insult done to his sister Srupanakha and the death of his brother Khara, but mostly out of his own lust and greed. Discovering Sita missing, Rama and Lakshmana set out to find her. In their search, they encounter the monkey king Sugriva whose evil brother has stolen his kingdom. Rama helps the monkey king regain his kingdom and in return, Sugriva and his monkey army, under the command of the able general Hanuman, dedicate themselves to serving Rama. The bears, allies and friends of the monkeys, join them. Together they make their way to Lanka and battle Ravana's demon forces. Many fierce battles take place with both sides using magic and divine intervention.

Here we see Rama and Lakshmana with Garuda, Vishnu's vehicle, surrounded by their allies. In the battle for Lanka, the heroes have been put out of commission by Indrajit's snake arrows (see slide 20 below). Here they have been rescued by Vishnu's divine vehicle, the Garuda, a natural enemy of snakes. The crowd of allies includes the bear, Jambavan, a favorite in the Punjab Hills, where bears are still found. On the right appears the human head of Vibhishana, the "good" demon who has defected to Rama's camp.

This painting comes from a point late in the story. In this late portion of the Shangri Ramayana, the artist has not yet completed the areas of gold paint which usually embellish these paintings.

## Slide 20



Indrajit Invisible in Battle  
Ramayana Book VI  
Kangra, ca. 1790  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

Who do you see fighting here?

Can you identify the allies of Rama and Lakshmana and the demon army?

What weapons do the monkeys and bears use? What is going on in the middle of the picture?

If you get up close to the screen perhaps you can see that Rama and Lakshmana, who are collapsing in the ground, have poisonous snakes wrapped around and attacking their bodies.

Where do they come from? What can we tell about their adversary?

### Story

During the siege of the golden fortress of Lanka, Indrajit, son of the demon king Ravana, rides out in a chariot to defend his father, as we see in the distance on the right. Uttering a mantra (spell), he suddenly disappears. His weapons, horse, and chariot all vanish. Secure from his invisible vantage-point Indrajit shoots Rama and Lakshmana with snake-arrows (left middle-ground); to their side the monkey king Sugriva and the defector Vibhishana deliberate over what to do. The monkeys retaliate against the demons below with a hail of trees and boulders.

Obviously Indrajit's invisibility would be a challenge to represent. The painter from Garwhal creates a haunting shadow, which might be cast by a figure in the sky. Infrared photography reveals the horse, chariot, and demon were carefully sketched in. Then as if re-enacting Indrajit's magic act, the drawing was shrouded in gray paint.



## Slide List

### Slide 1

Adoration of Saraswati  
Gouache on paper  
Chamba, ca. 1800  
Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco  
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts  
Gift of Paul Wonner

### Slide 2

Vishnu  
Schist  
Pala period, early 11th century  
Bangladesh  
Asian Art Museum B60 S48+  
The Avery Brundage Collection

### Slide 3

Shiva Nataraja, or Dancing Shiva  
Bronze  
Tamil Nadu, 12th century  
Collection of Robert Ellsworth

### Slide 4

Ganesha  
Chloritic Schist  
Hoysala period, 13th century  
Mysore, India  
Asian Art Museum B68S4

### Slide 5

Shiva Slays the Demon of the Three Cities  
Gouache on paper  
Mandi, ca. 1725  
Collection of Carol Summers

### Slide 6

Durga Killing the Buffalo Demon  
Gouache on paper  
Mandi, ca. 1750  
Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco  
Achenbach Foundation for Graphic Arts  
Gift of William Theophilus Brown 1984.2.53

### Slide 7

Matsya, the Fish Incarnation of Vishnu  
Gouache on paper  
Guler?, ca. 1795, attributed to Sanju  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

### Slide 8

Varaha, The Boar Incarnation of Vishnu Battles  
Hiranyaksa  
From the Bhagavata Purana  
Gouache on paper  
Guler, ca. 1740, possibly by Manaku  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

### Slide 9

Krishna as Vena Gopala (the Flute-playing  
Cowherd)  
Brass  
16th-17th century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum 88.493

### Slide 10

Durga Slaying the Demon Water Buffalo  
Brass with cloth garments  
Eighteenth-nineteenth century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum 88.483

### Slide 11

Altar  
Arranged by Dhriti Bagchi with assistance of  
Sanjiban Guba  
for The Newark Museum  
including:  
1. Shrine with Krishna and Radha  
Brass, 19th -20th century  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin,  
1987-1988  
The Newark Museum, 87.186, .187; 88.480  
2. Plate and Bowl  
Bell-metal  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988

The Newark Museum, 88.511, .526  
3. Plate  
Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Richard J. Nalin, 1988  
The Newark Museum, 88.523, .525

**Slide 12**

Worship of the Linga  
Mahakala Temple, Ujjain, M.P.  
photo © Aditya Arya  
Courtesy of The Asia Society

**Slide 13**

The Marriage of Krishna and Rukmini  
Gouache on paper  
Guler, ca. 1750-1770, possibly by Nainsukh  
Asian Art Museum, B84 D8  
Gift of George Hopper Fitch

**Slide 14**

Vishvamitra, Rama, and Lakshmana Take Leave  
Shangri Ramayana, Book I  
Gouache on paper  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Carol Summers

**Slide 15**

Sita on Her Father's Lap Meets Emissaries from  
Ayodhya  
Shangri Ramayana, Book I  
Gouache on paper  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

**Slide 16**

The Night Departure of Rama  
Ramayana, Book II  
Gouache on paper  
Kangra, ca 1775-80  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

**Slide 17**

The Queens Visit Rama in Exile  
Ramayana, Book II  
Gouache on paper  
Kangra, ca. 1775-80  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

**Slide 18**

Rama Confronts Khara and His Demon Troops  
Shangri Ramayana, Book III  
Gouache on paper  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Carol Summers

**Slide 19**

The Garuda Bird Returns Rama and Lakshmana  
to the Monkeys  
Shangri Ramayana, Book VI  
Gouache on paper  
Bahu, ca. 1690-1700  
Collection of Charles and Glenna Campbell

**Slide 20**

Indrajit Invisible in Battle  
Ramayana, Book VI  
Gouache on paper  
Kangra, ca. 1790  
Collection of Gursharan and Elvira Sidhu

## History of the Punjab Hills and Pahari Painting from the 17th to the 19th Centuries

Far to the north in the foothills of the Himalayas lie the states of the Punjab, or Five Rivers (referring to the Indus and its major tributaries). This region is also called Pahari (“hill”) and was a collection of very small states whose rulers had come from Rajasthan and Central India between the seventh and twelfth centuries, displacing the earlier rulers. There are two major groups of states: In the north, between the Chenab and Ravi Rivers, the Jammu group includes Jammu, Basholi, Jasrota, and Mankot; on the other side of the Ravi is the Kangra group, which encompasses Kangra, Guler, Chamba, Mandi, Nurpur, and the Kulu Valley; to the south, in a crook of the Sutlej River, lies the state of Bilaspur, and further southeast is Garhwal.

Most of the states were interconnected by family ties, so there were few major wars. Minor skirmishes over boundaries would occasionally erupt, but they were not usually of long duration. Except for Kashmir to the north of the Punjab, the region was not seriously affected by the early Muslim invasions. The Mughals, however, made the Punjab a tributary area and seized the Kangra Fort as well as the most arable lands. In their own proud words, they “cut off the meat and left the bone.” In order to curb rebellion they took hostages, an heir or other family member, to live at court.

From the early period there are no known miniature paintings that parallel the paintings of Malwa or Merwar in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In the late seventeenth century, after a period of major conflict between Basholi and one of its neighbors, a conflict that brought in the Mughal powers, stability finally returned to the region, and under Raja Kirpal Pal (r. 1678-1695) of Basholi a stunning new style of painting emerged full blown. How it came about and why in this state at this time is unclear, but there is some speculation that one of Kirpal Pal's predecessors, who spent some time at court when still a young prince, had found favor with the Mughals and perhaps brought back with him an interest in the arts that he found among them. In any case, the style is strong, accomplished, and unique, reflecting the Hindu taste found in earlier Rajput painting. The compositions are simple, consisting of a two-part division of the field, the use of strong, flat background color, and conventionalized landscape features. Enlivening the picture is the use of the rich, colorful patterns of contemporary carpets and textiles. Figures are bold and gestures expressive; faces are shown in profile with sloping foreheads and large eyes. They are heavily bedecked with jewelry which is given a special sparkle by the application of small bits of iridescent beetle cases. Simpler versions of the style from Basholi and surrounding states preserve its intensity and expressiveness.

Following the death of Aurangzeb the weakened Mughal empire was unable to prevent another wave of incursions by the Afghans and Persians. In 1739 Nadir Shah invaded and sacked Delhi. The Punjab was ceded to the Afghans, who actively controlled only the lower plains area and Kashmir, leaving the Hill States to manage themselves. The chieftains regained the land which had been taken over by the Mughals and redistributed it among the stronger states; they also profited commercially from a rerouting of the major trade route between Delhi and Kashmir to an ancient road that ran through Bilaspur, Guler, Basholi, and Jammu.

All of this activity had an effect on the art of the region. The sack of Delhi propelled many artists out

of the capital to look for refuge and work in Rajasthan and the Punjab Hills. As might be expected, their arrival inspired a new style in Pahari painting. Some mid-eighteenth century paintings show a very close affinity to late Mughal art with its delicate drawing, naturalism, and cool, airy quality. Gradually, however, a new style emerged which fused these Mughal tendencies with some of the Basholi intensity and rhythmic vitality. As in Basholi painting the favored subjects were themes from Hindu literature and religion and perhaps a wider range of court portraiture.

The early and late versions of this style are usually grouped under the title of Kangra painting, but some historians who see two distinct aesthetic intentions call the early painting Guler. It is, on the whole, a lovely, gentle style characterized by fluid drawing, tenderness of expression, and romanticized yet naturalistic landscape. The colors in the early period are a little brighter and of a greater range, but overall they are serene and clear.

Later eighteenth-century skirmishes arose which involved the newly formed Sikh state; this turmoil naturally had an effect on the stability of the region. Shifting alliances and the movement of people hastened the spread of the style throughout the region. One prominent family of artists, referred to as Seu-Nainsukh, was painstakingly traced by scholars using village records; the research reveals the family's dispersion within the area over several generations and so traces the movement of at least one facet of the style. Eventually its effect was felt in the distant state of Garhwal in the southeast corner of the region.

## Regional Styles

Phase 1) Basohli, 1670--ca. 1730. Space is flat. Colors are deep and vibrant, often highlighted by the shell of an iridescent green beetle (called beetle wing) applied to represent jewelry. Large eyes with tiny pupils give an unfocused expression to the dreamy or fierce faces.

Phase 2) Guler, 1730--1760. Space is built up from layered planes, some drapery becomes transparent and three-dimensional, and some faces become individualized. The diversity of this transitional phase demonstrates the ingenuity and adaptability of many Indian painters. The fine, if conservative, work of the celebrated Guler artist Manaku is influential; his younger brother Nainsukh broke more radically with Basholi norms. Paintings throughout the Hills show a comparable transition, selectively including some of the illusionistic effects and meticulous detail of painting made for the Mughal (Islamic) rulers of Delhi. The Mughal style was still alive in the turbulent plains of north India, and was drawn upon by Rajput painters in many areas.

Phase 3) Kangra, 1780--19th century. Here the mood of gentle romance takes over. Colors are largely pastel, and beetle-wing decoration vanishes. Slender figures combine the ideal with the possibility of reality. And deep natural landscapes participate in human emotions. The result is not a rendering of the three-dimensional for its own sake but rather a sensuous recasting of earlier religious themes. Variants of these broad styles continued into the twentieth century. Successors of Manaku were still painting in the 1960s and may be responsible for the latest works here.

## The Eccentric Style of the Kingdom of Mandi

Mandi means literally “market” and forms a commercial crossroads at the southern end of the Pahari region. Two eccentric rulers, Sidh Sen and Shamser Sen, gave a distinctive cast to painting in Mandi from 1680 till 1780. Throughout their reigns, bold profile figures are set against a simple background. Yet faces are individualized and details rendered carefully, to capture quirky local subject matter. The thin use of paint stands out among more densely layered forms of most Pahari painting (see slides 5 and 6).

## Some Favorite Themes

### The Goddess

Many diverse cults of female divinities originated in various parts of India's complex social fabric and at various times in the long history of the sub-continent. These cults include the demure consorts of patriarchal gods as well as awe-inspiring independent goddesses. From the eighth century on, esoteric (tantric) Hinduism conceived the feminine as the active power (shakti) of static male divinities. In the Punjab Hills, an unusual number of images show a goddess worshipped by major male gods, suggesting that the feminine principle was seen as autonomous and under some circumstances superior. Folk cults, peculiar to the Pahari area, coexist with pan-Indian forms such as Durga, known from Sanskrit literature. Today seemingly contradictory fierce and benign forms are revered collectively as Devi (The Goddess) or Maa (Mother), her very diversity forming proof of her power.

### Vaishnavism

Much of Pahari painting was shaped by broad movements of emotional devotion to a personal god, known collectively as bhakti. Any divinity may be the object of bhakti, but in the Hills Vishnu, who repeatedly delivers the world from peril, predominates. Vishnu assumed forms that came to be regarded as a specific set of ten incarnations or avatars. These include the Fish or Matsya (see slide 7), Rama (see slides 14-20), and the Buddha. The eighth avatar, Krishna, is a mischievous cowherd boy, mighty hero, devoted friend, and irresistible lover. His name, literally “The Dark One,” led to his depiction as blue-skinned. This form lent itself to the emotional devotion of bhakti. Krishna can inspire amusement, wonder, and passionate love simultaneously. Small wonder that the worship of Vishnu or Vaishnavism is largely equated with adulation of Krishna.

Krishna appears in the ancient Sanskrit epic, the Mahabharata, as the heroes' charioteer and guide. In the Harivamsa, an appendix to the epic added much later, he has become a human hero who kills the demon Kamsa. By the tenth century in the Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu's multiple forms are chronicled systematically, including the exploits of Krishna the cowherd, a version that is often chosen for illustration. By the twelfth century, the Sanskrit poet Jayadeva in the Gita Govinda develops Krishna's romantic relationship to a single cow-girl (gopi), Radha.

The seventeenth century witnesses a Vaishnava renaissance in the Hills, propagated by missionary saints. Influential rulers, such as Sangram Pal of Basohli (1635-73) turned from images of the Goddess

to romantic subjects such as the Rasamanjari in which the unidentified hero might be identified as Krishna. Likewise Guler rulers in the early eighteenth century and Sansar Chand of Kangra (1775-1823) became devotees of Krishna. The motivation may have been in part political turmoil as Mughal power faded, Europeans appeared, and various outside Indian forces fought. Certainly the history of painting benefitted from the demand for images of this playful saviour divinity. Compellingly illustrated, his love for humanity could take the form both of vivid, passionate romps and journeys through flowered hills.

## The Ramayana: A Synopsis

The epic Ramayana has long been a favorite subject of courtly painting, for the hero Rama illustrates the royal ideals of martial prowess and moral virtue. He is Vishnu's seventh incarnation, born on earth as the son of King Dasaratha of Ayodhya. As a youth, Rama demonstrates his extraordinary powers in killing demons and by bending the bow of King Janaka, a feat that wins Rama the hand of Janaka's daughter Sita. Plans to crown Rama as heir apparent are thwarted by machinations of his father's junior wife. Instead Rama is exiled for fourteen years; obediently he leaves Ayodhya accompanied by his wife Sita and by his faithful brother Lakshmana. The threesome travel into the forest of Dandaka, besieged by fierce demons. A demoness, Surpanakha, tries to seduce Rama, and Lakshmana cuts off her nose. She reports the indignity to her brother Khara, who attacks Rama but is killed in battle. Surpanakha then seeks help from her eldest brother, the ten-headed demon Ravana. To avenge his sister, Ravana kidnaps Sita and brings her to his island, Lanka. Rama enlists the aid of a monkey king, Sugriva, his devoted deputy, Hanuman, and the monkey troops in order to rescue Sita. After many adventures, Rama's army arrives in Lanka and battles Ravana's forces. Before attacking Ravana, they must first fight his son Indrajit and brother Kumbakarna. After a fierce battle, Rama slays Ravana and returns victorious to Ayodhya.

### Early Ramayana Paintings: The Shangri Ramayana

The pictures of the Ramayana shown here come from the initial and final phases of Pahari painting. The first, hung above, belong mainly to a large manuscript known as the Shangri Ramayana, 270 pages of which were till 1961 in the collection of the small court of Shangri, a valley to the east of Kulu. They have recently been linked on the basis of style with the northwestern Pahari court of Bahu. Surely several different painters worked on this ambitious manuscript, which may have been painted between 1690 and 1700. The first hand is in the Basohli idiom with flat picture planes, minimal setting, and dramatic color (see slides 14, 15, and 19). Yet slide 18, also from the Shangri set, is the work of a painter who has toned down his palette and begun to paint with the meticulous detail of the Guler phase, comparable to Manaku's style two decades later yet boldly narrative rather than lyrical.

### Later Ramayana Paintings

The second major group of Pahari Ramayana images, hung below, are in the Kangra idiom. The palette is both broadened and muted. Spatial recession enables the painter to include successive events in a single scene, enriching and telescoping the narrative. Illusionistic detail adds a sense of mystery to the repertoire of dramatic effects (see slides 16, 17, and 20).

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