

# Differentiating Early Forms of Religion in India

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will review the previous lessons on early forms of religion in India. Specifically, this lesson will review:



### HINT

Use the Key Related Concepts listed above or the following sections in this lesson to review and differentiate between early forms of religion from this unit

## 1. Ancient India



### REFLECT

Revisit the [Ancient India](#) lesson to review some of the historic, geographic, and cultural background of ancient India.

Ancient Indian culture developed around the Indus Valley. The ancient religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are fundamental to the cultural understanding of Indian civilization.

Religions	Description
Hinduism	<p>Hinduism is considered the oldest continuously practiced religion, reaching back 4,000 years, making it several years older than the next oldest continuously practiced religion, Judaism. Hinduism originated with the development of the Vedas, Hindu texts written in the ancient language Sanskrit. There are several tenets that are essential to Hinduism.</p> <p>Samsara are earthly pleasures that lead people to desire to be reborn. This idea of rebirth or reincarnation is fundamental to Hinduism. However, it is believed in this religion that samsara can lead to unhappiness. The path to happiness is achieved through the elimination of the samsara through moksha, an enlightenment later called nirvana. Brahman is a unifying cosmic spirit.</p>
	<p>Buddhism is based on the teachings of Gautama Buddha, who was known as the Buddha or the Enlightened One. Gautama Buddha lived from about 563 BC to 483 BC.</p>

Buddhism	Buddhism has central tenets as well, which were essentially revealed to the Buddha. The Buddha then went out roaming India to share his discipline with others. One of the central tenets of Buddhism is that life is a journey of self-discovery, with the ultimate goal being to achieve nirvana, or a profound peace of mind. Nirvana is also analogous with enlightenment and the elimination of earthly desires, or suffering, through the path of liberation.
Jainism	<p>Jainism, once a major religion in ancient India, originated sometime before the ninth century BC. However, it has since been marginalized to a minor religion, unlike Hinduism, which is still quite a major religion, or Islam, which is practiced by many in modern-day India.</p> <p>One of the central figures in Jainism is Mahavira, who established the central tenets of Jainism. These foundational laws describe what Jainism encompasses. One of these laws is a very forward-thinking idea, pluralism, which is concerned with truth and the relativity of viewpoints. There's not a single perception of truth, but instead, it depends on your point of view.</p> <p>Another thought, or law, has to do with the cosmic spirit or soul that all living things are endowed with, from the lowliest bacteria to human beings. Essentially, souls are inherently pure, and karma attaches itself to a soul.</p>

## 2. Influence of Buddhism on Ancient Indian Art



Revisit the [Influence of Buddhism on Ancient Indian Art](#) lesson to review the ways in which the Buddhist religion influenced ancient Indian art during the Mauryan Period.

The Buddhist religion began to show its influence on ancient Indian art during the Mauryan Period.

Aspects	Description
Buddha	<p>The Buddha is important, because he's the founder and namesake of Buddhism. His name means "enlightened one." He was born as Siddhartha Gautama around 563 BC and died in 483 BC.</p> <p>Buddhism looks at life as a journey of self-discovery, with the ultimate goal being to achieve nirvana, which is enlightenment or a profound peace of mind. To do this, earthly desires, considered suffering, must be eliminated. Working towards this is called the path to enlightenment.</p> <p>Upon becoming enlightened, Siddhartha changed his name to Gautama Buddha, or simply the Buddha, and decided to travel around India to preach his discipline. One of the places that he stopped was called Sarnath. Sarnath has become a pilgrimage site for Buddhists, because it was here that the Buddha converted a man named Kondanna and his followers. This conversion in turn created the first Sangha, or Buddhist community.</p>
	<p>King Ashoka ruled the Mauryan Kingdom from 272 BC to 231 BC. The Mauryan Kingdom was the largest ancient Indian period. It was founded in 323 BC after the defeat of Alexander the Great and the Macedonians, or Greeks. This is important because later King Ashoka adopted Buddhism. In doing so, he made it the national religion. The Pillars of Ashoka were monumental</p>

Ashoka and Buddhism	<p>forms of architecture, large pillars about 30 to 40 feet tall. The Ashokan Pillars were inscribed with the laws, or edicts, which Ashoka based on the dharma, the idea of duty in Buddhism.</p> <p>These pillars were embedded in the earth and created a connection, in this case a vertical connection, between heaven and earth. This connection is called axis mundi. The pillars, which were inscribed with these laws, or edicts, were located everywhere in order to ensure people were adhering to the laws.</p>
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### 3. Yakshi Figures



#### REFLECT

Revisit the [Yakshi Figures](#) lesson to review the physical characteristics of the Yakshi figures and what they represent.

Yakshi are female earth spirits that have ties to Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. They are common sculptural elements worked into the architectural motifs of religious structures, such as stupas. Often depicted as voluptuous female figures with wide hips, these figures are spirits associated with fertility and protection.

It is important to try and view these depictions in the context in which they were created rather than any modern-day context. These figures might be looked upon as being sexual or as objectification of the female figure today, but in their time, they were intended to depict the embodiment of the female spirit. This was accomplished by emphasizing some of the physical features that distinguish the female figure from the male figure.



#### SUMMARY

This tutorial reviewed early forms of religion in India from earlier lessons, such as **ancient India**, the **influence of Buddhism on ancient Indian art** and **yakshi figures**.

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