

The Hindu Temple

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

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

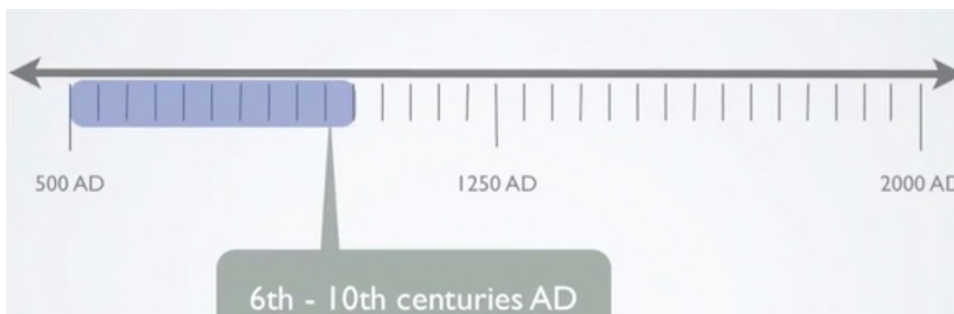


BIG IDEA

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

1. Time Period and Location: The Hindu Temple

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



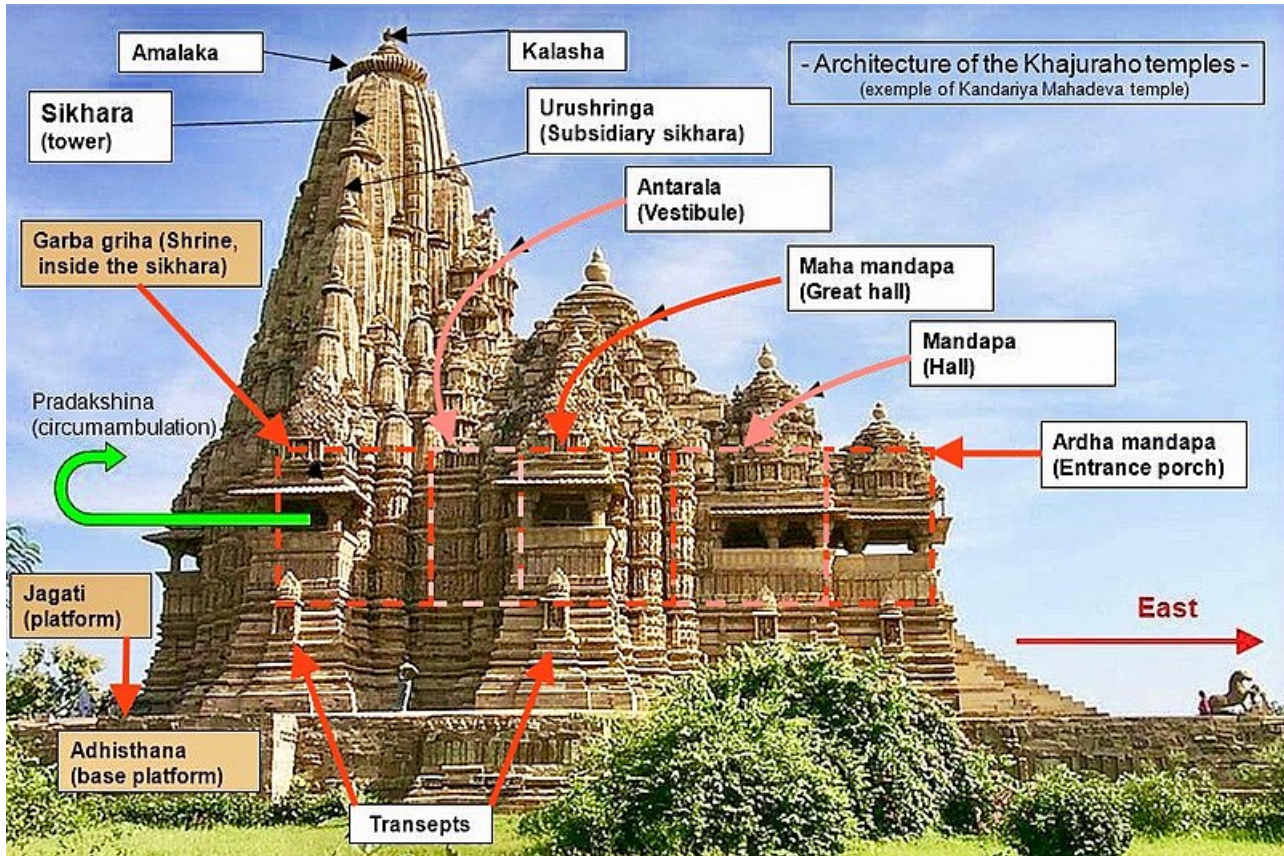
2. Hinduism

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

This idea of multiple perspectives is fundamental to Hinduism, as it helps explain how Hinduism appears to weave between polytheism and monotheism. This is true despite the fact that at its core it lacks the sense of organization and monotheism of many other religions.

3. The Hindu Temple

Hindu temples were considered a god's home on earth. There is an interesting contrast between vibrant and occasionally shocking imagery on the exterior and the supposedly serene and calm atmosphere of the interior. Sculptural motifs in these Hindu temples are more than decorative, as the gods themselves are thought to be manifested through the imagery of the temple. They are sacred buildings. The mountain shape **shikhara**, referring to the peak of a mountain, is typical of northern-style temples.



Ordinary worshippers stand near the entrance and **mandapa**, which is a public gathering place. The most sacred inner chamber, the **garbhagriha**, is essentially a “womb room” where the deities, idols, or icons are located. These rooms are only accessible by high priests, or brahman.



TERMS TO KNOW

Shikhara

The roof of a Hindu temple

Mandapa

In Indian architecture, a pillared outdoor hall for public ceremonies

Garbhagriha

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

4. Vishnu Temple at Deogarh

Below is an image of the Vishnu temple from Deogarh.



Vishnu Temple

500 AD

Stone and masonry brick

Deogarh, India



DID YOU KNOW

Vishnu is one of the primary deities in Hinduism.

This is an old structure dating from 500 AD, and is an example of an earlier, simpler type of Hindu temple. It's rectangular with a tower that originally would have been about 40 feet tall. Even though the building is rather simple in its design, it's decorated with elaborate sculptural reliefs, in particular the sculptural guardians that protect the entrance.

5. Khajuraho Temple Complex

Below is an outer view of the Kandariya Mahadeva temple complex at Khajuraho, India.



Kandariya Mahadeva Temple

1000 AD

Sandstone

Khajuraho, India

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

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

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

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

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



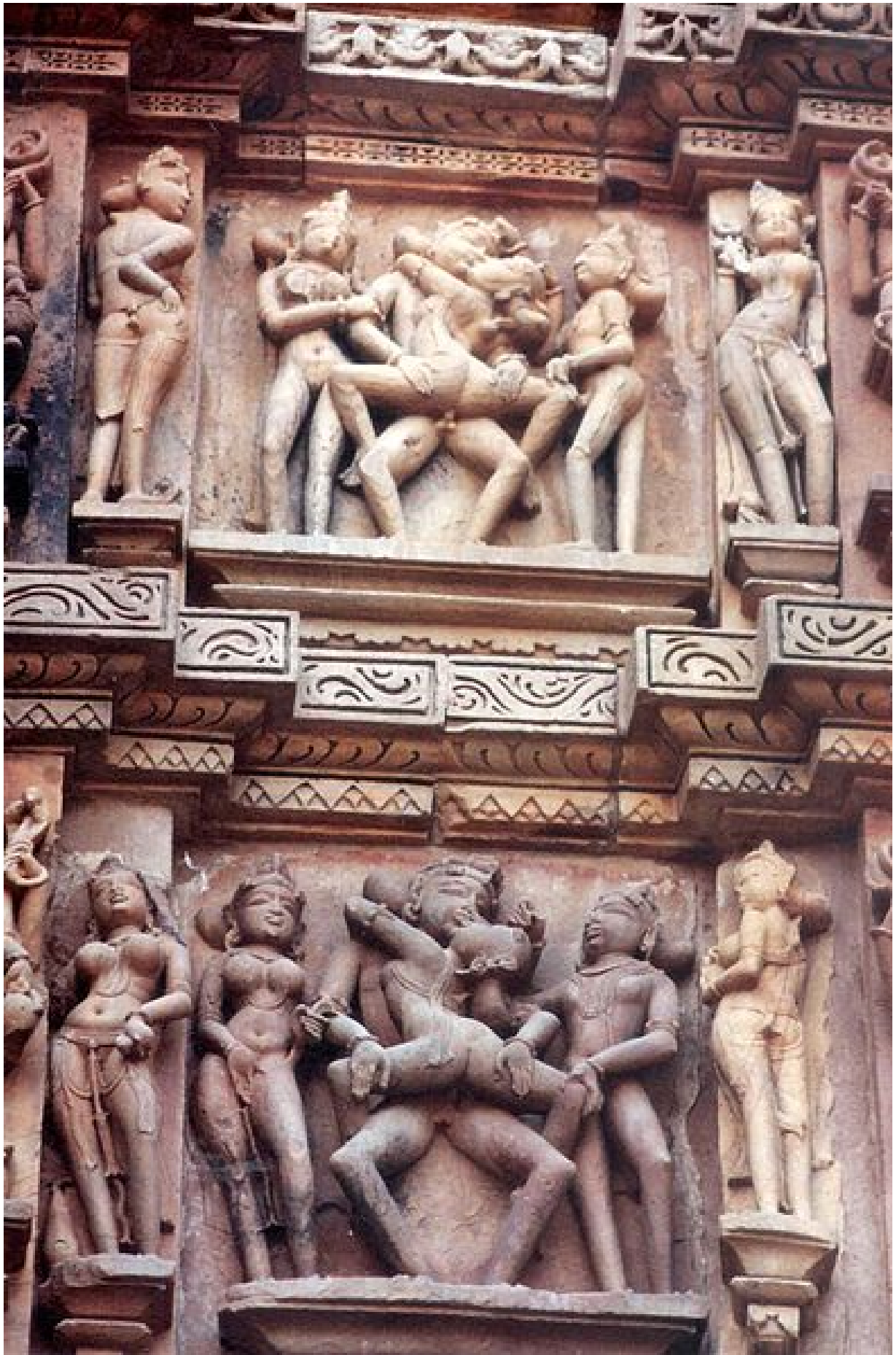
Exterior sculpture at Kandariya Mahadeva Temple

1000 AD

Sandstone

Khajuraho, India

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



Exterior sculpture at Visvanatha Temple

1000 AD

Sandstone



DID YOU KNOW

Visvanatha means “lord of the world.”

The above images, from the north side of the temple, are called the **mithuna** reliefs, which is a Sanskrit term related to sexual union. There is also a presence of **tantra** and **shakti** in specific locations on the facade of the temple, in particular where the mandapa and the garbhagriha meet.



THINK ABOUT IT

Notice the individuals in these two images just above. They seem to be enjoying themselves. Why do you think images like this are located on the side of a religious temple?

These images are not something you would see on the side of the Western, or European style, church. The purpose of images such as this is debated among scholars, but one of the more plausible suggestions is that the imagery on the exterior is a positive representation of sexual relations as well as sexuality in its celebrated role within the religion. This idea sharply contrasts with negative views associated with sexuality that were and continue to be pervasive in Western religions.



TERMS TO KNOW

Mithuna

Sexual union for the purpose of creating divine energy

Tantra

A series of beliefs and ritual practices that seek to channel divine energy

Shakti

Female divine energy, often personified as a goddess

6. Shiva Nataraja

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



Shiva Nataraja (Lord of the Dance)

1000 AD

Bronze

The above sculpture is intended to be portable, and is considered a physical embodiment of the deity, not just a sacred image. It was treated as the actual deity, and cared for like a real person, or a **personal god**. This

personification was intended to encourage the **bhakti**, or active involvement, on the part of the worshipper. The bhakti was also a common form of worship that has a close association with Hindu temples, and is a unique form of worship that distinguishes Hinduism from other religions.



TERMS TO KNOW

Personal God

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

Bhakti

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



SUMMARY

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

Finally, you looked at examples of the Hindu temple:

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

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TERMS TO KNOW

Bhakti

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

Garbhagriha

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

Mandapa

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

Mithuna

Sexual union for the purpose of creating divine energy.

Personal God

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

Shakti

Female divine energy, often personified as a goddess.

Shikhara

The roof of a Hindu temple.

Tantra

A series of beliefs and ritual practices that seek to channel divine energy.