

Anderson 1990=Indian Art

The Dravidian Civilizations (the Indus River Valley, W. India). The earliest at 2,000 B.C. with the famous mud brick cities of Harappa & Mohenjo-Daro with wide, well-drained streets (1st public sewer) & spacious 2-story houses. The rulers had grand palaces. Seals with Indian humped cattle (Brahma) are shown. Subsequent to Middle Eastern civilization & perhaps some trade & influence (stimulus diffusion), based on intensive irrigated agriculture in an arid landscape. These populations were dark in skin color & spoke languages like Tamil. Bronze dancing girls are shown in miniature art.

@ 1,500 B.C. The lighter-skinned and more warlike "Aryan" Invasions from the Eurasian steppes with chariots & horses conquered the indigenous city-dwellers & established the beginning of the caste system (Max Müller, the German philologist based in England & co-discoverer that Sanskrit, the ancient language of the Vedas, oral traditions & myths, and Ancient Greek were "cognate" (the Greek male Sky God, for ex., is Zeus, the Vedic male Sky God is Dyaus; both are polytheisms) & both were members of the Indo-European language family. Modern genetic studies still show that Brahmins, the priestly order highest varna in the caste system, are closely related genetically with Europeans. They had shamans who used the Fly Agaric mushroom (soma), a hallucinogen, to be replaced over the centuries by the bodily discipline of yoga, more amenable to the indirect sacred access of the Brahminical priests.

But Indian art & culture are still alien to the West, largely because India has never been a historical civilization (like Europe, the Middle East or China), but a metaphysical civilization* where cyclical time, not linear time is important & rather than engagement with the world, world renunciation has been central to the ethos (witness India's 2 classical religions, which it spawned, Hinduism & Buddhism).

Different Attitudes toward Media (the bronze "Dancing Shiva" is perhaps India's most famous sculpture-from S. India in the 13th cen.), because of the Western bias for "substantiality" "preciousness" & "permanence", but in India metal sculpture (nor any kind of sculpture, nor even painting) were **not** considered a major art, Drama, poetry & song (all ephemeral "performance" forms)* were, perhaps from the Aryan Vedic tradition* They were ranked lower because they did not have a time dimension (altho their kinetic nature approaches time via frozen action)*, whereas the performance arts unfold in time; while history isn't important, time is!

Another "contradiction" from the Western perspective, religious art is linked with the **erotic** (the Kamasutra, for ex., or Tantric practices), since human love annihilates self in caring for the other, a central religious notion also; human love serves as a simile for the union with God.

Bhakti, the southern (Dravidian) school of devotion & emotion, the nuptials of Radha & Krishna, milkmaid & herdsman, earthly Bride & Heavenly Bridegroom, are similes of the union of the human soul with God.*

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, the premier aesthete & interpreter of Indian art in the west, & the author of The Dance of Shiva (1918) & The Transformation of Nature Into Art (1934)

The "Classical" Period of Indian Art begins in the 3rd cen. A.D., but crystallizes ideas that are much earlier, from the oral traditions which were finally codified in written Sanskrit as the 4 Vedas (descriptions of hymns, prayers & Hindu rituals), the last section, called the Upanishads, which champions Brahma (the Creator-sometimes as a God, but more accurately Godhead (Atman), or the Absolute. To merge with that is the goal of the cycle of birth/rebirth (**reincarnation**) & **Karma**, sacred merit.

Bharata=Like "Homer", several anonymous writers, active in the 3rd cen.

A.D., the 1st speculative work on art (principally practical matters of drama), but he introduces the concept of rasa

Abhinava=a later thinker from Kashmir & influenced by Tantricism. He wrote 2 commentaries on Bharata & elaborated the rasa idea. Art as the "5th Veda", principally drama, accessible to women & Shudras.

1.) art gives pleasure to mortals via the senses (was created by Brahma)

2.) can be used by mortals to better themselves in rebirth, a means of the 4 principal goals of life:

a.) righteousness (within the orthodoxy of the Vedic tradition)

b.) spiritual emancipation from the senses (from "maya")

c.) but also 2 "profane" goals from the Western perspective: material prosperity (hence Ganesh)

d.) enjoyment of refined, worldly pleasures

Maya=the empirical world of the senses is neither real nor unreal, but it is empirically "true"

Rasa=the experience of art, one semantic pole being "flavor" (hence "taste"), another pole is "essence" or total engagement of a cognoscenti audience

"Radical Dualism"*=The Upanishads lay out the view that the realm of the senses are unreal, therefore one must transcend the natural world to achieve union with the spiritual world.

The Caste System

- A.) **Castes**, as in India & West Africa:
- a.) Established initially by **military conquest** by an **alien ethnic élite** (e.g., "Hinduism" & Caste in India, 1,500 B.C. Aryan conquest of indigenous Dravidian speakers)
 - b.) Therefore, continues to be **endogamous**, therefore **hereditary**
 - c.) Maintained by **prohibitions=taboos** on contact between castes, i.e., ritual "purity" and "pollution"
 - d.) And **occupationally specialized**
 - e.) This "fixes" or "fossilizes" the conquest-period society & its technology; very hard to adjust to technical change, i.e., where do you put software engineers?
- B.) Hindu society composed of 4 **varnas** (or caste groupings) + the outside group, the "untouchables" (sweepers=removed excrement leather workers, butchers, body cremators, etc.). They can't go into temples, must drink out of their own wells, etc. midwives are also included in this group, generally darkest in skin color= the original **Dravidian** speakers
- 1.) **Brahmin**=priests & scholars, must purify themselves after contact with lower castes; they are the speculative thinkers about art, hence the elevation of the performance arts (& architecture because of its association with temples) & downgrading of the figural arts because of the latter's association with specialized sub-castes of Vaishyas
 - 2.) **Kshatriyas**=nobles & warriors
 - 3.) **Vaishyas**=merchants & artisans
 - 4.) **Shudras**=farmers
- C.) Within each caste there are sub-divisions=**jati**, as in a shudra varna village being divided into several jati: "potters", "weavers", "tailors", etc.
- D.) Economically, made practical by the **Patron/Client**=Jajmani system, jajman[patron]/kamin[client]
- E.) Justified thru religion, the **Rig Vedda**, in Sanskrit, social order= cosmological order., **Cosmological Body**, Brahmins=Head, Kshatriyas=arms, Vaishyas=torso and legs, Shudras=feet
- F.) in ethnomedicine=**Ayurvedic Medicine**
- G.) & in Cosmology=**Reincarnation & karma** through vast kalpas= (cycles) of time

H.) This may lead to "reinventing" the history of one's own caste to maintain that it came from a higher **varna**; one can see this in social promotion in foreign settings like Guyana where many shudras have become brahmins & send their children back to India for a classical education