

Sacred Arts and Architecture

Hindus believe that the arts are a fundamental expression of *bhakti* (devotion). The Gandharva Veda, one of the Upa Vedas, is dedicated to the fine arts. The Epics and other Hindu stories are often depicted through art, dance, music, and drama to help devotees understand the life lessons found in scripture and to enable a tangible, emotional connection with the divine. The God Shiva, considered to have the power of transformation, is often envisioned as Nataraja, or the Lord of Dance.

Performing Arts

The Natya Shastra, an ancient text on the performing arts, defines the concepts of mood (*bhavas*) and mental states (*rasas*). Through different actions, like singing, dancing, or performing drama, the artist enacts or plays out a mood to invoke an emotional state in the audience. Moods and emotional states have different names in Sanskrit, but they both align to the feelings of love, pity, anger, disgust, heroism, awe, terror, and comedy. Through combinations of movement, modulation, and expression, artists seek to invoke a variety of different feelings in their audience.



Dancers and actors use four skills (physical movements, speech, costume and makeup, and facial expressions) to create all the moods and mental states. The artists work to depict different stories from Hindu lore. Acting can be very spiritual, and leads to spiritual progression from both the actor and the spectator. The Natya Shastra also outlines how to construct a stage, how to direct, and even how spectators should conduct themselves during a performance, among many other things. Many texts have been written since the Natya Shastra, further developing the art of drama. Hindus have been using drama as a tool for communal spiritual development for centuries.

Music

Those who create music themselves, through their voices or their instruments, also often follow guidelines from scriptures that guide individuals to use music as a means to express *bhakti*. Like the moods and mental states used by actors and dancers, singers and instrumentalists try to evoke different psychological and spiritual states with different musical scales called *raga*, beat or *taal*, and volume. There are many *raga* and *taal*, and they range from invigorating to soothing to healing. *Bhajans* or *kirtana* (hymns) are based on a variety of *raga* and *taal*, and they are often sung in temples or at home shrines by Hindus as expressions of devotion and community worship.

Architecture



Hindu architecture deals with aligning human construction with the natural energies of the cosmos. The principles of how

to accomplish this are detailed in a text called Vastu Shastra. The Vastu Shastra guides Hindus on how to construct their homes and their temples in the best manner. There are five areas of expertise within this field: orientation, site planning, proportionate measurements, building components, and aesthetics.

Temples in India vary greatly in their architecture, based on the region in which they were built, and vary in style from country to country. While the aesthetics and physical presentation of each *mandir* may vary greatly, a few constants are held in common by all temples; they are planned on a grid of 64 or 81 squares, and the entrance to the deity should always be facing east so that the morning sun can light up the temple's entrance, allowing the deity to face the sunrise as priests conduct morning rituals and sing the deity's praises. Principles like these are used to plan many Hindu homes as well. Some Hindus may avoid buying a home that faces south, or may consult with an expert in Vastu Shastra before buying a home or planning how to place their furniture. Essentially, Hindus believe that the five elements -- earth, wind, water, fire, and space -- and cosmic energy have the potential to influence human behavior, and aim to plan spaces which exude and enhance balance and harmony.

Key Takeaways

- In Hinduism, the arts are a fundamental expression of *bhakti*, or devotion.
- Hindu architecture aims to plan spaces in harmony with the natural energy of the universe.