

Hinduism through the Eyes of Cultural Materialism: Sacred Artifacts on Display in the Divine Design Museum Exhibit

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Museum Research Project



- Peck Hall exhibit
 - Hindu deity statues
 - "Triumvirate" and lesser Deities

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Museum Research Project



- Religious Center exhibit
 - Hindu altar for worship
 - Replication of authentic altar

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Focus of Museum Project

- Two Main Goals
 - 1) Address problems of understanding a polytheistic religious tradition from a predominantly Western, monotheistic one
 - 2) Address inadequacies of previous research

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Religion of a "million" gods?

- Polytheistic
 - More than one god
 - E.g. Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Lakshmi etc.
 - Hinduism is a "special" case
 - Yes, there are many visions of god...
 - BUT...there is only one absolute, pervading divine force known as **Brahma**

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Religion of a "million" gods?

- Hindu deities are incarnations of **Brahma**
- i.e. The divine manifests itself in the form of various deities in order to connect with each individual devotee
 - Worshipping one or more of the incarnations, facilitates unity with the absolute, divine **Brahma**

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Holistic Approach

- Research examines 3 aspects of culture (**infrastructure, structure, and superstructure**) in relation to the 4 properties of artifacts (**meanings, functions, processes, and values**)
- Previous work has focused solely on only one of the above aspects or the relationships between two of them

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Illuminations

- Research shows that the 4 properties of artifacts are deeply interconnected with the 3 aspects of culture
- Understanding the relationships between these is necessary to have a more complete picture of Hindu religion and culture

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Examples of Relationships



- Process for creating deity statues is inherently spiritual and rooted in the physical environment

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Examples of Relationships

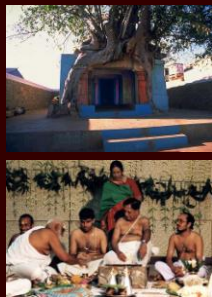


- Function of deity statues is primarily religious, but it is also social and thus connected to both structure and superstructure

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Examples of Relationships

- Altars are created and function for religious purposes, but they are also related to the structure and infrastructure of Hindu culture



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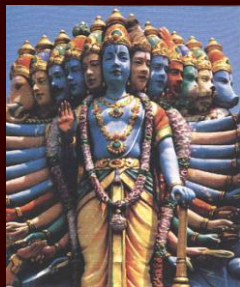
Results...



- A Nandi bell is one of many types of bells that are used in daily *pooja* or prayer.^[1] Brahmins ring the bell during prayer while they wave the lamps in front of the deity's image.^[1] The bells function as a means of shattering devotees' train of thought, thereby making the devotee directly receptive to the miracle of divine presence contained within the image of the deity.^[1]
- ^[1] Hindu religion: 400
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