

SHAKTI, BHAKTI, DARSHAN AND YOGA:
PRACTICE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE RELIGIOUS ART OF INDIA

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Working Definitions:

- Shakti = Power
- Bhakti = Devotion
- Darshan = Nondual Seeing
- Yoga = Union/identity in consciousness

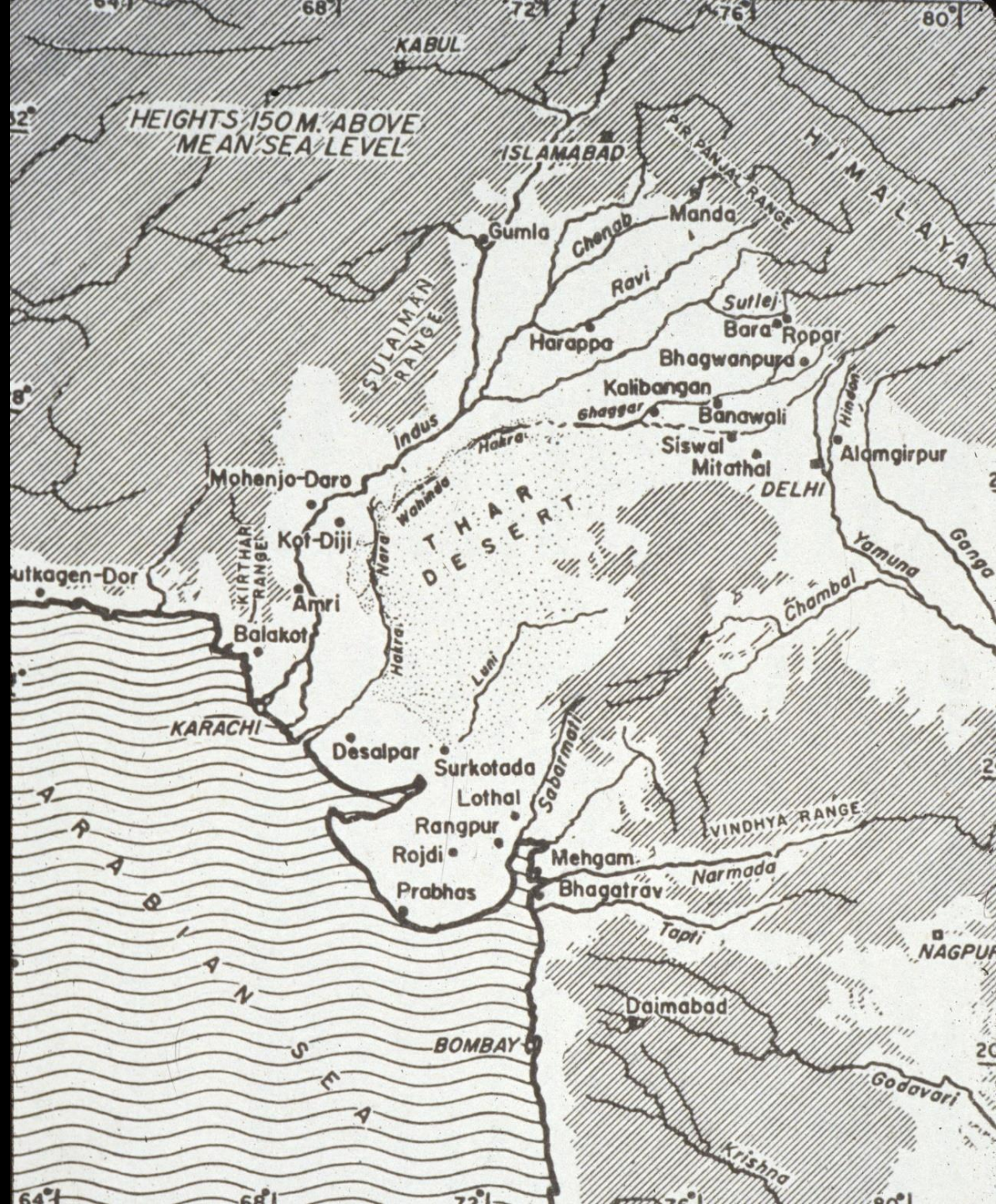
Indus Valley Civilization

Integration Phase: 2600 BCE – 1800 BCE



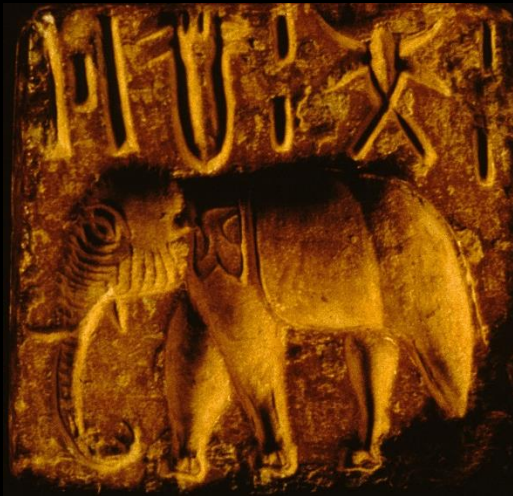
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ANIMAL SEALS

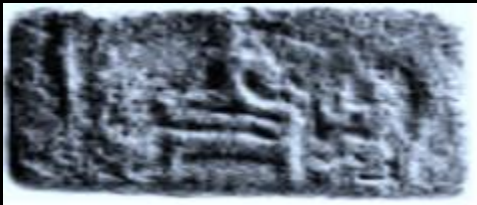
powerful animals, some domesticated, some wild, some mythical



ANIMAL CONTESTS



YOGA: SELF-DISCIPLINE FOR POWER



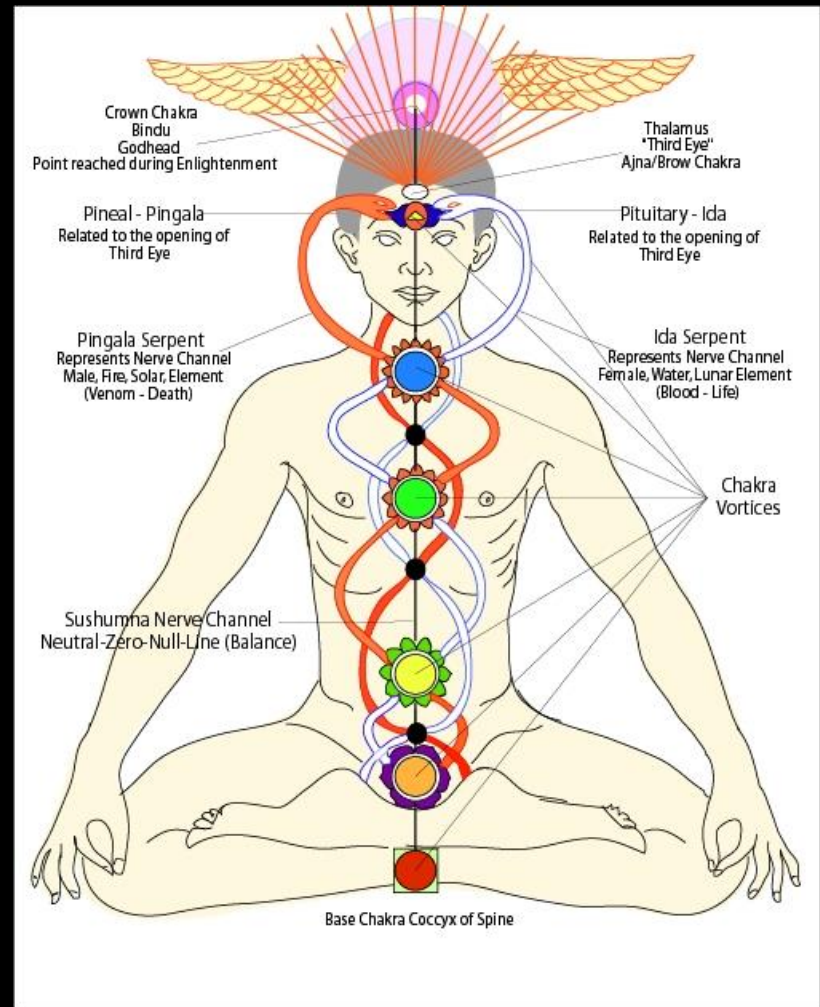
YOGA: SELF-DISCIPLINE FOR POWER

- asana – yoga posture (related to kundalini raising practices)
- powerful animals surround – elephant, rhino, tiger, buffalo: control over animals, protection of weak
- horned and/or vegetal headdress – assimilation of the animal and plant worlds, therianthropism
- possibly three-headed – multiplicity convention
- erect phallus - ithyphallic



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Domination: slaying of therianthropic demons
(eg. Durga slaying the buffalo demon)

Assimilation:

1. animal vehicles (vahana)
(eg. lion/tiger for Durga, bull for Shiva, Garuda/Naga for Vishnu, rat for Ganesha)
2. deities with animal or therianthropic forms
(eg. Naga, Varaha, Narasimha)

Protection: (eg. Buddha with deer under seat at Sarnath, Shiva Dakshinamurti as teacher of animals)

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possibly three-headed – multiplicity convention
erect phallus - ithyphallic



Multiplicity convention: many heads, many hands, etc.
signs of multiple distributed capacities or functions
(eg. Durga's ten hands with weapons, Shiva's five heads,
most gods have four hands for four directions, etc.)

Erect phallus - ithyphallic:

1. sign of male fertility or creativity
2. result of "upwardization" (urdhwa retas) of energy (Shakti) in kundalini experiences

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YOGA: SELF-DISCIPLINE FOR POWER

Is this Shiva?

Lord of Animals: the discoverer of this seal, Sir John Marshall equated it with Shiva because Shiva is known as Pashupati (Lord of animals). This has been contested because that name for Shiva appears late in Shiva texts. However, this is not a disproof.

Five Headed: Shiva has five heads standing for his five functions of creation, preservation, destruction, concealment and revelation. He is usually shown with 3 heads because the fourth is behind and the fifth is above and invisible.

Erect phallus - ithyphallic: the aniconic symbol of Shiva is the erect phallus (linga) where he is seen as a fertility god and a master of yoga due to “upwardization” (urdhwa retas) of energy. In this he is considered the Lord of Yoga (yogeshwara) and the master of his internal power (Shakti).

Animal correspondences: Shiva is lord of the bull (vahana), dominates the elephant, protects the deer and wears ornaments of snakes

Human/Divine equation: Even if this is not Shiva, and a human being who “cultivates” power through internal discipline, the border between human and divine is very thin in Indic religions. The gods maintain their power through yoga and humans become divine through yoga.



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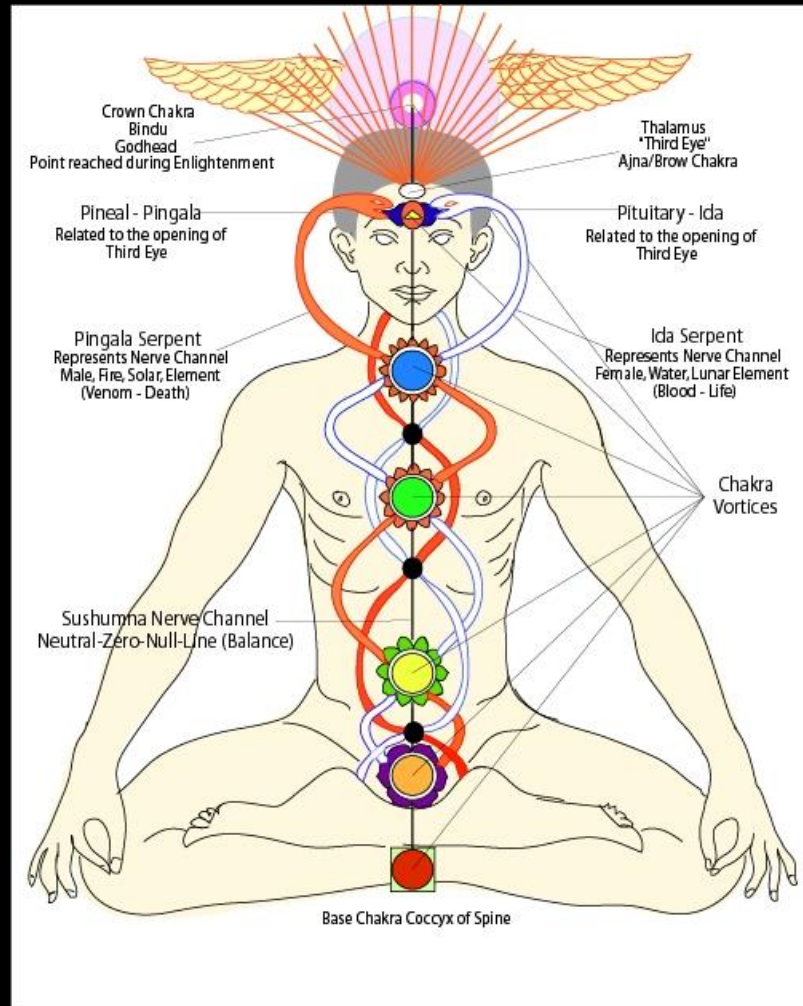
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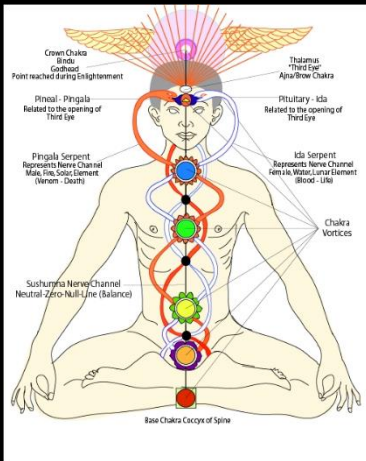


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asana – yoga posture (related to kundalini raising practices)



KRIYA/RITUAL : PROPITIATION OF NATURE FORCES (SHAKTI)



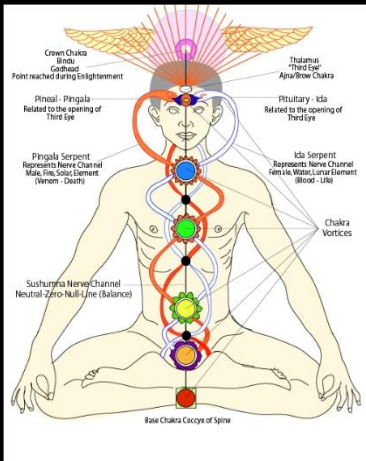
Horned priestess making ritual offering of ram or deer to a horned goddess in a “vessel” made up of branches and leaves, most possibly of the pipal tree (*ficus religiosa*).

Below (or above) are seven (or six) female figures with horns or antennae.

- seven chakras seen as sources of power (shakti)?
- goddess in “vessel” seen as supreme Shakti uniting all others?
- vessel as female fertility symbol/offering vessel/human body with ascending or descending goddess power?
- horns/plants emblems of assimilation of nature within the human adept/divine?



KRIYA/RITUAL : PROPITIATION OF NATURE FORCES (SHAKTI)



Later connections:

- Six mothers (krittika/Pleiades) or seven mothers (sapta matrika) goddess cults assimilated under Durga
- Vessel (ghata) with (Ganga) water worshipped in pujas as additional symbol of deity
- Animal sacrifices in (Tantric) rituals to the goddess
- Idea of “bhakti” (devotion/adulation) to the goddess within the ritual form (kriya, later yajna, puja)



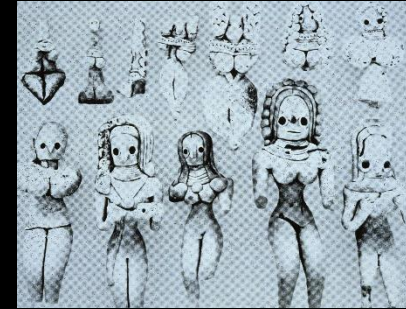
YOGA AND KRIYA: TWO WAYS FOR MAXIMIZING SHAKTI

- Later texts point to 2 ways of approaching the divine: Yoga (asceticism and self-discipline) and Kriya (ritual)
- In the Indus Valley, these two “ways” may have been gendered – yoga for male ascetics, kriya for females
- Later the two feed into each other, particularly in Tantra and Puja – ritual is used in processes of internal self-discipline; and results of self-discipline (eg. contemplative identification with the deity) are used in pujas
- Even then, one may continue to see uses of objects, texts and practices which are designated principally for one or the other purpose.
- Most of the objects in this exhibition are for use in puja (ritual) but some are for use in personal meditation/contemplation, repetition of spells (mantra) or to enhance personal power by their presence.



MOTHER GODDESSES (MATRIKAS)

- All in terracotta, style is emblematic
- Fertility and sustenance highlighted
- Elaborate headdresses, sometimes horns or flared headdress
- Rare example with multiple hands and bowls of food and other offerings
- Mostly found in rubbish heaps – surmise: temporary (seasonal or functional) ritual use and discarded after use.



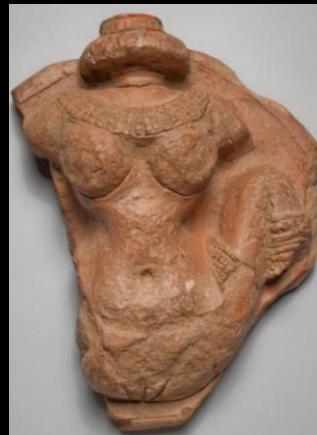
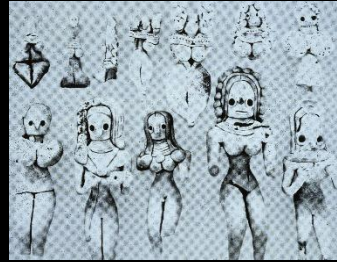
Later connections:

- Tantric goddesses used in magic rituals made of clay for functional use
- Seasonal goddess pujas, made of clay and discarded after use
- Continuation in archeological record
- Goddesses of power and goddesses of fertility/prosperity later constellate in Kali kula and Shri (Lakshmi) kula



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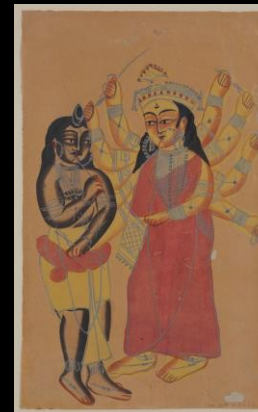
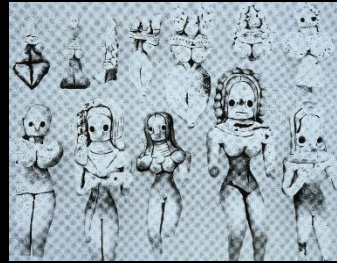


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1500 B.C.E. – c. 300 B.C.E.: GAP IN THE ARCHEOLOGICAL RECORD

- Movement to the East (Gangetic plains) and South due to tectonic plate shifts in Indus Valley
- Use of perishable materials – hence, little except terracotta and ceramic shards remain
- Aniconism? Indus Valley marked by “small” objects – an ascetic social tendency?
- Post-Indus disappearance may be due to further ascetic tendency towards aniconism – needs examination
- Period of major religious textual traditions
 - Vedas (c. 1500 B.C.E.)
 - Major Upanishads (c. 1000 B.C.E. – 700 B.C.E.)
 - Gautama Buddha (5th c. B.C.E.)
 - Vardhamana Mahavira (5th c. B.C.E.)
 - Sankhya philosophy – Kapila (?)



VEDAS: SOLAR MYTHOS

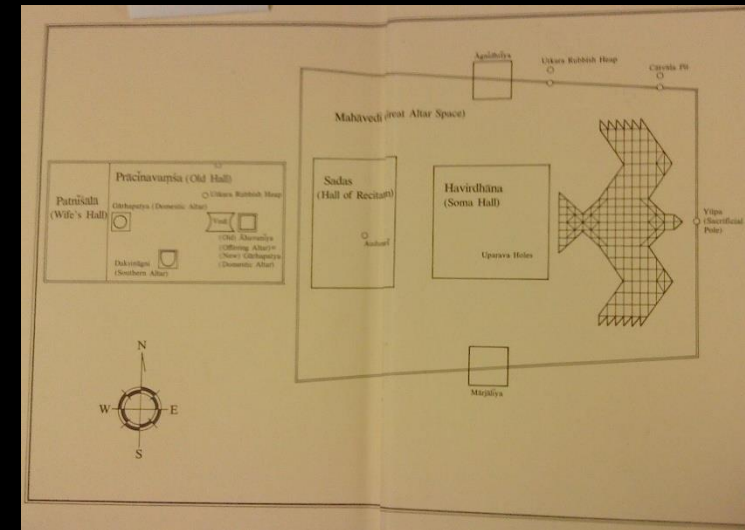
- Vedas bring new cyclical cosmological Ideas
 - Repetition of days and nights
 - Repetition of seasons
 - Central Idea: return of the Sun
 - macrocosm equated with microcosm
- Cosmo-psychology of the Vedas:
 - “Veda” means “knowledge” or “wisdom”
 - Three regions – heaven, mid-world and earth
 - Heaven is solar world, all is illuminated equally by the Sun
 - Mid-world and earth are realms of darkness.
 - Sun “descends” into the darkness and is swallowed up by the demons/asura
 - In the mid-world, the sun is represented by Indra and the gods (sura)
 - Indra is lord of thunder and lightning, who illuminates the Night and breaks open the dark places, causing the Sun to be released
 - On earth, the sun is represented by Agni (Fire), who is the “priest of the sacrifice” – i.e. carrier of human fire rituals (yajna) invoking Indra and the gods to bring Victory over the asuras of the Darkness.
 - This is represented in the texts through poetry of devotion and invocation (bhakti) to the gods
 - Each return of the Sun leads to a “higher” Dawn (i.e. a spiral or evolutionary movement) where the cycle is repeated



VEDAS: SOLAR MYTHOS

- Ritual and Psychological Consequences of the Vedas;

- Fire rituals (kriya as yajna)
- Sun God is Surya, also known as Vishnu, also called Purusha
- Idea of emanationism, Purusha sacrifices itself and becomes four cosmic forces of manifestation - leading to four castes
- Purusha as Cosmos (later emanationism of Vishnu in Pancharatra theology and of Shiva in Kashmir Shaivism/ Shaiva Siddhanta, Vairochana in esoteric Buddhism, also Lokapurusha in Jainism)
- Return of the sun, succession of days and nights – idea of reincarnation, though not explicitly mentioned in Veda
- Return of the sun, can also be seen in terms of the returns of Vishnu – later manifest in idea of avatars
- Vishnu’s traversal of three realms (trivikrama)
- Since the sun illumines everything equally, both Vishnu and the Sun god are later shown in “samabhanga” – i.e. frontally, with no body “breaks.”
- Later practices of circumambulation (heliocentric idea)
- Later chariot festivals
- None of the Vedic gods are depicted (aniconism) – only rituals using geometric altars (eg. **Agnichayana**) (Doris Srinivasan refers to it as “ritual as icon” – the entire enclosed ritual space becomes charged with divine energy).
- Leads to idea of “magic geometry” in later temples and Tantric diagrams (yantra)



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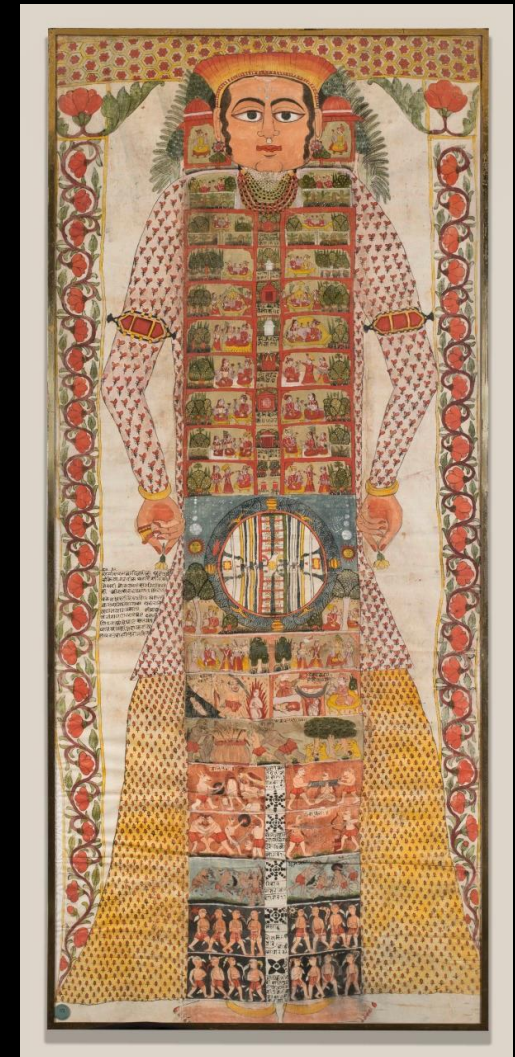
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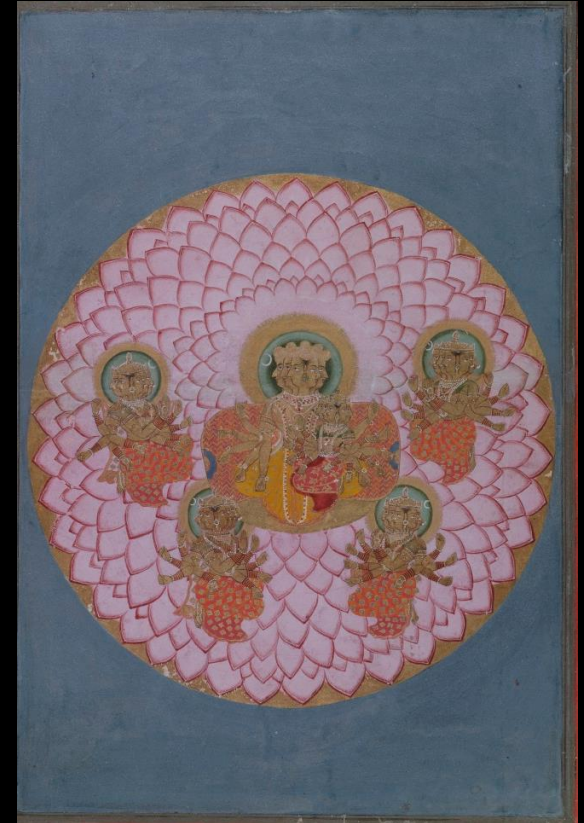
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- Sun God is Surya, also known as Vishnu, also called Purusha
- Idea of emanationism, Purusha sacrifices itself and becomes four cosmic forces of manifestation - leading to four castes
- Purusha as Cosmos (later emanationism of Vishnu in Pancharatra theology and of **Shiva in Kashmir Shaivism/ Shaiva Siddhanta**, Vairochana in esoteric Buddhism, also Lokapurusha in Jainism)
- Return of the sun, succession of days and nights – idea of reincarnation, though not explicitly mentioned in Veda
- Return of the sun, can also be seen in terms of the returns of Vishnu – later manifest in idea of avatars
- Vishnu’s traversal of three realms (trivikrama)
- Since the sun illumines everything equally, both Vishnu and the Sun god are later shown in “samabhanga” – i.e. frontally, with no body “breaks.”
- Later practices of circumambulation (heliocentric idea)
- Later chariot festivals
- None of the Vedic gods are depicted (aniconism) – only rituals using geometric altars (eg. Agnichayana) (Doris Srinivasan refers to it as “ritual as icon” – the entire enclosed ritual space becomes charged with divine energy).
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UPANISHADS – FURTHER ASCETIC TENDENCY

- Upanishad means “to sit near” referring to intimate initiatic circles of ascetics
- May have arisen to counteract priestly and royal casteist hegemony of Vedic rituals that had degenerated
- Later referred to as “Vedanta” or “end of the Veda” carrying its psychological wisdom
- Thus, Vedas became characterized as “kriya” (ritual) texts and Upanishads as “jnana” (knowledge) or yoga (union with divine) texts
- Hence no ritual manifestation to Upanishads, even greater aniconism
- Idea of gods subordinated to impersonal and formless principle Brahman
- All individual appearances are self-appearances of Brahman as Atman
- One may think of supreme solar deity of Veda as Brahman and rest of gods and creatures as self-appearances atman) of Brahman (later theistic schools do this)



UPANISHADS – FURTHER ASCETIC TENDENCY

- Day and Night of Veda are equated to cosmic psychological conditions of Vidya (Oneness) and Avidya (Separateness)
- Reincarnation is explicitly asserted
- Goal of the human becomes to escape from the condition of Avidya and from the cycle of rebirths by attaining to union with Brahman
- The principal way of achieving this is through a variety of forms of self-discipline, mainly **meditation**
- Hence, Upanishads assert the meaning of yoga as meditation (dhyana) rather than of acquisition of power (Shakti)

Later Consequences of Upanishads:

- Later manifestation of gods (Shiva, Vishnu, Devi) are all equated with Brahman
- Meditation/contemplation becomes canonical as yoga practice
- A layer of aniconism becomes normative to all manifestations of yoga (self-discipline) and kriya (ritual)

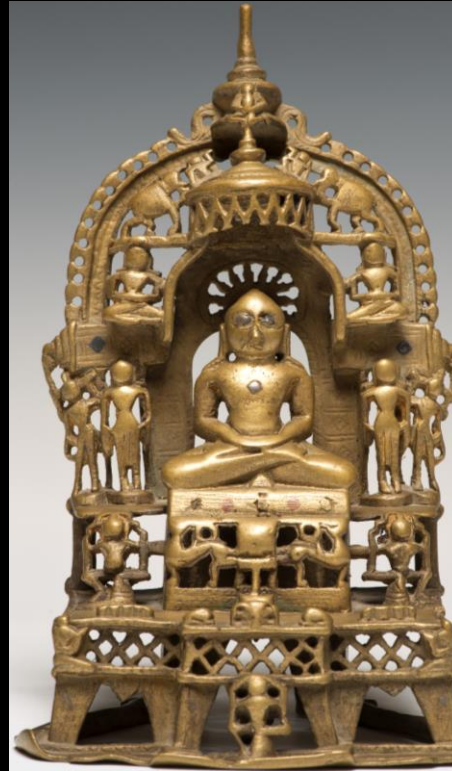


POST-UPANISHADIC PHILOSOPHIES AND PRACTICES

- Buddhism
 - Jainism
 - Sankhya
- All three are empirical rather than transcendental (as with Veda and Upanishad), taking everyday experience as starting point
 - All three seek liberation (nirvana, purusha) from condition of suffering and cycles of rebirth
 - All three privilege meditation and are initially aniconic
 - Sankhya is dualistic and posits a gendered duality of soul (male) and nature (female) – may be related to Indus Valley gendering of yoga (male) and kriya (female)

Later Consequences of post-Upanishadic schools:

- **Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism develop images of their teachers in meditation**
- Sankhya combines with Upanishads in depiction of Puranic gods with their consorts (purusha/ishwara and prakriti/shakti)



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FORMS OF ANICONISM

- Ritual as Icon (Veda)
- Magic Geometry as Icon (Vedic altar – later temples and Jain/Tantric diagrams/yantra)
- Relics as Icon (Buddhist stupa)
- Associated objects (metonym) as Icon (Buddhist stupa)
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- Semi-formed image as icon (regional cults such as Jagannath/Srinathji)
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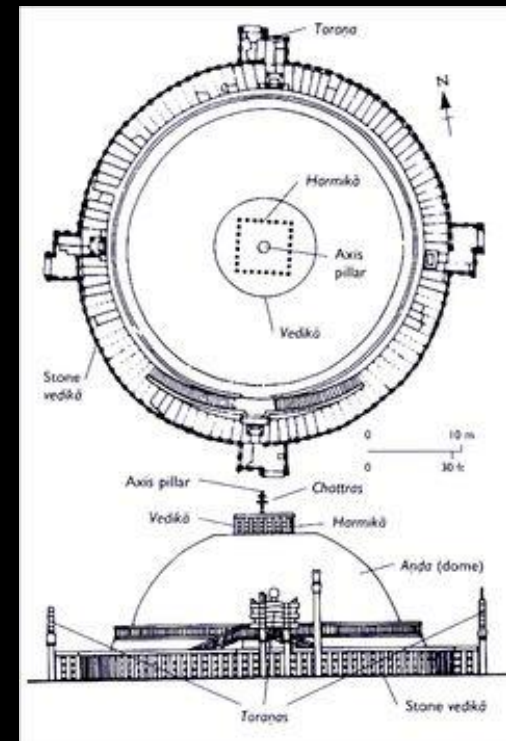
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BUDDHIST PRACTICE – 1500 B.C.E – c. 1st c. C.E.

- Stupa (relic mound)
- Vedika (railing surrounding stupa)
- Torana (gate marking entry into “magic” space)
- Vedic idea of sun “descended” into the earth and “emerging” from it – Buddha’s relics as solar embryo – space of fertility
- Practice: circumambulation within vedika – heliocentric clockwise revolution around the sun, receiving its power (Shakti)
- Aniconism in early Buddhism – no images on stupa
- Images on vedika and/or torana – mythic animals, Vedic gods, nature deities (yaksha/yakshi), life stories of Buddha, past life stories of Buddha (Jataka)
- Buddha never depicted in these stories – associated objects of scene (metonyms) stand in for Buddha
- Possible reasons for aniconism: early Buddhist emphasis on meditation (yoga over kriya), theology of nirvana – Buddha erased himself from his past
- But metonymic scenes from Buddha’s life on vedika/torana not only enhance magical power of the space but attract eye-open contemplation and reception of Buddha’s “presence” (idea of “darshan”)



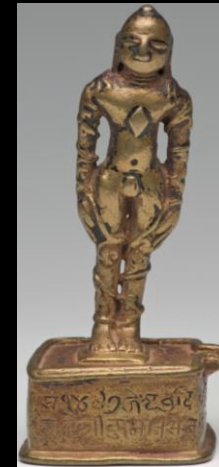
CHANGES FROM 1st c. C.E.

- Appearance of figurative icons (Jain, Buddhist, Hindu)
- Cause: possibly increased devotionism, patronage by Central Asian kings (Kushanas)
- Hindu gods: Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Durga
- **Buddha images** in **Gandhara** (Greco-Roman) and **Mathura** (Indian mainland style)
- Jain: standing (kayotsarga) and seated (padmasana) Jinas in meditation
- From 5th c: Hindu temples in stone, niche or shrine images of Buddha in stupas and Hindu gods in temples
- Circumambulation (pradakshina) in Buddhist stupas, Jain monuments/temples and Hindu temples
- Outer niche images arranged according to a program
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DARSHAN IN PUJA

- Hindu/Jain/Buddhist rituals include figurative icon of deity
- Ritual meant to cause “descent” of the deity’s presence and power into the icon
- Devotees gaze at the icon as it is being adulated through ritual (arati), taking it to be living
- Devotional gazing leads to enhanced mutuality with the deity, inducing moment of nondual seeing (darshan) and identity (yoga)
- Idea of union with the deity through seeing its figurative icon – yoga through kriya/puja



VISUAL CULTURE IN SELF-DISCIPLINE (YOGA)

- Contemplation of images/geometric diagrams (yantra)
- Internal visualization
- Use in personal rituals including recitation of mantras

