

Topics to explore in preparation for *The Clay Cart*

The Clay Cart presents a marvelous opportunity to explore and learn about the culture of ancient India, including its music and dance.

Audiences might better enjoy *The Clay Cart* with an understanding of the following topics:

- ☞ Hindu culture and religion, especially Ancient Indian traditions since the play was written over 2,000 years ago.
- ☞ The Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses. These major gods and goddesses are mentioned in the play as well as many minor deities: Brahma, Siva (or Shiva), Visnu (or Vishnu), Lakshmi, Indra and the Mother of the Universe (known by many names including: Shakti, Earth Mother, Devi, the Great Goddess).
- ☞ The relationship between Hinduism and Buddhism. What are Brahmins? What is a Buddhist monk? What are the responsibilities, obligations and privileges of each?
- ☞ The relationship between theatre and religion in Hindu culture.
- ☞ The role of song and dance in the Hindu theatre tradition.
- ☞ The caste system. *The Clay Cart* takes a very human look at people from a variety of classes in Ancient Indian society from slaves to kings. Although it is an ancient play, it questions traditional ideology about castes and asks what makes people noble: birth, class, deeds, character? An understanding of the caste system will help students connect with this theme in the play.
- ☞ The social status and role of women in Ancient Indian society, including the role of the courtesan, the wife, the mother and the slave.
- ☞ Locate Ujjayini, where the play takes place, on a map of India.

Websites to explore:

- 🔗 Articles about the theatre of India including information about the origins of Hindu drama, dramatic structure and how plays were traditionally presented.

<http://www.theatrehistory.com/asian/indian.html>

- 🔗 A well-organized and informative site called the Heart of Hinduism written from a **Hindu perspective. According to the website, “Heart of Hinduism is an educational resource that explains the Hindu traditions in clear terms. It is produced by practitioners of the tradition and is meant for all who wish to broaden their knowledge of Hindu traditions.”**

<http://hinduism.iskcon.com/>

Within the Heart of Hinduism site there is a very interesting series of articles about the history of India which introduces history from the traditional Hindu perspective and compares it to a chronological history.

<http://hinduism.iskcon.com/tradition/1001.htm>

Another article worth noting about famous women in the Hindu tradition.

<http://hinduism.iskcon.com/tradition/1211.htm>

Information about the caste system.

<http://hinduism.iskcon.com/lifestyle/901.htm>

Information about Hindu gods and goddesses.

<http://hinduism.iskcon.com/practice/304.htm>

- 🔗 A well-organized site on Ancient India created for students by Dr. Karen Carr, Associate Professor of History, Portland State University. Includes brief, easy to understand pages on the caste system, religion, art, language and more. Also includes a few YouTube videos of Indian theatre and dance and a few classroom exercises.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/india/index.htm>

Worth noting on this site, a brief introduction to religion in India.

<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/india/religion/index.htm>

On the website Dr. Carr recommends the following books for students:

Eyewitness India, by Manini Chatterjee (2002). Written for kids.

Ancient India, by Virginia Schomp (2005). Written for middle schoolers. Very good for reports, and there is information about Indian art.

Indian Art (Oxford History of Art), by Partha Mitter (2001). Not especially for kids, but a good survey of Indian art for ordinary people, going from ancient India to modern India.

Indian Art, by Vidya Dehejia (1997). Also written for adults, but the author's the curator of Indian art at the Smithsonian Institution. She emphasizes the close relationship between Indian art and religion.

- ☞ An in-depth site about Hindu religion called *India Divine: An Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Includes articles, scriptures, forums, an extensive picture gallery of sacred places, art, images of gods and goddesses and much more.

<http://www.indiadinvine.org/>

A direct link to the picture gallery index on the *India Divine* site:

<http://www.indiadinvine.org/pictures/index.gallery.php?gid=11>

- ☞ A basic introduction to Hindu religion and philosophy.

<http://www.bnaiyer.com/vidya/basic-hinduism-title.html>

- ☞ An in-depth site written from a Hindu perspective about the Hindu way of life. Includes historical perspectives as well as information about modern Hindu culture.

<http://mailerindia.com/>

Information about Hindu gods and goddesses.

<http://mailerindia.com/god/hindu/index.php?entry>

A very interesting article from the mailerindia.com site **called “Hindu Women and Religion” that gives a** historical perspective on the role of women within the Hindu culture.

<http://mailerindia.com/hindu/veda/index.php?hinduwomen>

- ☞ Links about Kathak, a form of Indian classical dance.

<http://www.artindia.net/kathak.html>

<http://www.kathak.org/site/kathak/section.php?id=4176>

http://www.kathak.net/about_kathak.htm