

THE HINDU TRIAD

Bhagavan

The most explicit form of monotheistic worship of the personal **God** Svayam Bhagavan (IAST *svayam bhagavān*), "The **Lord**" or **Lord** Himself, is a Sanskrit theological term. The term refers to the concept of absolute representation of the monotheistic **God** as Bhagavan within Hinduism, while other sects tend to assume the existence of a singular **God**, but not necessarily with aspects of a personality but rather envisaged as an impersonal Absolute (**Brahman**).

There is always controversy over who is superior among the Hindu triad **Brahma**, **Vishnu** or **Shiva**. Almost all myths, though, agree upon **Brahma** being the creator among the three. Of the other two, **Vishnu** is the preserver while **Shiva** is the destroyer. Nevertheless, **Shiva**, who is usually symbolized by a phallic stone, is also acknowledged as a creator in conjunction with his female consorts who are accepted as the feminine power complementing his male potency.

Brahma is the equal of the other two **gods** in the Trimurti of **Brahma**, **Vishnu** and **Shiva**. He is the **god** of wisdom and the belief is that the four *Vedas* were delivered from each of his four heads. The *Vedas* are at the apex of all Hindu scriptures. They are texts that are derived directly from the **gods** and, as such, are indisputable. **Brahma's** heaven is believed to contain in a superior degree all the various splendors of the heavens of the other **gods**.

Brahma has red skin and wears white clothes. He rides on a goose. He has four arms. In one arm he carries the *Vedas*, in another a scepter, in a third a *komondul* (a special type of water jug that is stilled used by Hindus during worship), and in a fourth a bow or, variously, a string of beads or a spoon. As mentioned earlier in this text, **Brahma** has four heads. In this, **Shiva** who has five, outdoes him.

Brahma generated a female partner, generally acknowledged as **Saraswati**, out of his own substance. She is his daughter as well as his wife. Of her he gave birth to the human race. **Saraswati** is the Hindu **goddess** of wisdom and learning. Her initiation by **Brahma** at the beginning of all is symbolic of the maximum important knowledge and wisdom is to all beings.

Earlier myths, though, acknowledge **Yama** and his sister **Yami** as the creators

of the human race. Hindu myths have changed progressively over time. While very early myths often attribute one particular **god** or **goddess** with a particular earthly phenomenon such as the creation of humanity, later myths may choose a totally different deity for the same task.

Brahma also generated Daksha, a great Hindu sage, producing him out of his thumb. Daksha later became the chief of the prajapatis. The prajapatis are sages associated with **Brahma's** various creative endeavors.

The *Vedantas* (conclusions to the *Vedas*) consider Brahma to be the "Creative Aspect" of the **Nirguna Brahman**. The **Nirguna Brahman** is that which is neither attributable nor has any attributes. It is the ultimate **godhead** of Hinduism. **Brahma** is the aspect of the **Brahman** that is perceivable to humans. While this is true of all the other **gods** and **goddesses**, in Hindu creation myths that attribute **Brahma** with the creation of the human race, **Brahma** is the most superior among these humanly perceivable **gods** and **goddesses**. It is noted that while direct perception by common humans may not be possible, these **gods** and **goddesses** do have attributes and are attributable, which assists in their humanly meaningful portrayals. This, in turn, assists in human worship, which requires description. The **Nirguna Brahmin**, in contrast, is neither describable nor conceivable and, thus, not capable of being worshiped by common humans who have to approach it through its earthly perceivable representatives **god** and **goddesses** such as **Brahma** and **Saraswati**.

In India, even from ancient times, there are very few temples erected exclusively to **Brahma**. The myth that explains this strange neglect varies but it is generally agreed that a **god** or **goddess** whom he somehow angered cursed **Brahma**. **Shiva's** devotees agree upon one such specific myth. It goes thus.

At one time in the past, the two of the Hindu triad -- **Brahma** and **Vishnu** began an argument on who the most powerful of the triad was. The argument became so heated that the other **gods** asked **Shiva**, the third of the triad, to intervene. **Shiva** assumed the form of a gigantic lingam (the phallic symbol of **Shiva** that depicts him as a creator). The lingam was of flaming fire and it went up to the heavens and descended into the nether regions underneath the earth. Both **Brahma** and **Vishnu** agreed that if they could find how enormous the fiery lingam was they could determine who among the triad was the most powerful. **Brahma** took the form of a swan and went upwards along the length of the ascending lingam while **Vishnu** assumed the form of a boar and descended along the lingam into the nether regions.

Both went on and on but neither could reach the ends. **Vishnu**, being very clever, realized that he had been outdone by **Shiva** and came back to acknowledge **Shiva** as the greatest of the triad. Unfortunately, **Brahma** decided that he could get past **Shiva** with trickery. On his ascent to determine the end of the upper part of the lingam, **Brahma** had passed the ketaki flower (Pandanus odorifer). **Brahma** requested ketaki, who was used to inhabit the upper end regions of the lingam, to testify before **Shiva** that he, **Brahma**, had reached the uppermost end. Ketaki agreed and, when brought before **Shiva**, the flower told **Shiva** that he had observed **Brahma** reach the upper end of the lingam.

Shiva was angered at this lie. He cursed **Brahma** with the horror of not ever being worshiped on earth while he also cursed the flower with the depressing eternal condition of never ever being used in any Hindu worshiping rituals.

There are other more colorful versions of this same myth. One testifies that **Saraswati**, who **Brahma** himself had created, was a **goddess** of learning and wisdom and did not want to be associated with carnal desire. She was a symbol of sublime purity. **Brahma** though, when he began to feel the overpowering influence of the **goddess's** ethereal beauty, could hardly contain his passion.

Saraswati soon realized what was going on in her creator **Brahma's** mind. She changed forms to elude his inflamed overtures but he kept pursuing her and would not give up. **Saraswati** was afraid that his salacity would initiate sorrow on earth and on all beings. It is to be remembered that **Brahma** had first been created and had then created **Saraswati**. This was the time of the beginning of all that was and is.

There was only sublimity then without what **Saraswati** understood as the defilement that was carnal desire. So **Saraswati's** care not to get defiled by **Brahma's** sexuality must be accepted as concern for all beings that were to be. Finally, unable to contain the amorous **god, Saraswati**, in great anger, cursed him with an eternity of scant worship by all beings.

However, since we are here now, we must understand that **Saraswati** was reconciled enough with **Brahma** to enable him to create the human race in partnership with her. It is also notable that, akin to the fall of Adam from the grace of **God** and the subsequent loss of Eden, the lust of **Brahma** signifies the downfall of humanity. Hinduism believes that basic desires hinder total salvation from the cycle of births and rebirths. Total salvation, in Hinduism, is the reconciliation of the individual soul with the **Nirguna Brahman**, of which

everything is as well as is not.

It is symbolic that the **God** that was the first manifestation of the **Brahman** fell prey to that which prolongs separation from the **Brahman**. So it is that creation succeeded through the fall of **Brahma** and **Saraswati** from absolute sublimity.

The curse brought upon **Brahma** this uncommon human neglect. In contrast, **Brahma's** colleagues in the triad, **Vishnu** and **Shiva**, have innumerable temples dedicated to them all across India. The most famous and well known **Brahma** temple in India is at Pushkar in the desert state of Rajasthan. One other at the other end of India, the South, is at Kumbhakonam. Few other significant Brahma temples in India come to mind.

Brahma is treated better on the Indonesian island of Bali, which has a sizable Hindu population. He is much favored and large, splendid temples are erected to him wherein he is regularly and devoutly worshiped. The Indonesians practice a particular sect of Hinduism, called Agama Hinduism. **Brahma**, here too, is acknowledged as the first manifestation of the **Brahman** and the creator of all else that is.

Sanskrit grammar uses "**Brahma**" as the nominative singular of the generic neuter "**Brahman**." **Brahman** is the "Supreme Cosmic Spirit" of the universe in Hindu theology though it would be wrong to depict it as a spirit because, in absolute essence, it is without any attributes. In the native languages, there is a slight intonation on the last consonant "a" in the **god Brahma's** name.

VISHNU

Vishnu is regarded as a major god in Hinduism and Indian mythology. He is thought as the preserver of the universe while two other major Hindu **gods Brahma** and **Shiva**, are regarded respectively, as the creator and destroyer of the universe.

The original worship of **Vishnu**, by the Aryan conquerors of India or the original Dravidian inhabitants is not definitely known. In the ancient Vedas, the body of literature known as the Veda, and sacred literature of the Aryan conquerors, **Vishnu** is ranked among the lesser **gods** and is usually associated with the major Vedic **god Indra** who in the epics and Puranas fights against dragons and demonic forces. These latter writings emerge during the later development of Hinduism.

It is throughout this literature and especially through incarnations that **Vishnu** is raised to higher rankings within the Hindu pantheon. He becomes the prominent second **god** of the Trimurti, the Hindu Triad, while **Brahma** is first and **Shiva** is third.

In some Puranic literature **Vishnu** is said to be eternal, an all-pervading spirit, and associated with the primeval waters that are believed to have been omnipresent before the creation of the universe.

The concept of **Vishnu** being the preserver of the world came relatively late in Hinduism. Presumably it sprang from two other beliefs: that men attain salvation by faithfully following predetermined paths of duty, and that powers of good and evil (**gods** and **demons**) are in contention for domination over the world. When these powers are upset **Vishnu**, it is further believed, descends to earth, or his avatar, to equalized the powers. Further it is thought that ten such incarnations or reincarnations of **Vishnu** will occur. Nine descents are said to have already occurred, the tenth is yet to come. **Rama** and **Krishna** were the seventh and eighth.

Another interesting speculation concerning **Vishnu's** role as preserver among many modern scholars is that it is characteristic of the practitioners of Hinduism to raise local legendary heroes to **gods** in the Hindu pantheon.

Vishnu is portrayed as blue or black skinned and has four arms. He has a thousand names and their repetition is an act of devotion.

Shiva The third **deity** of the Hindu triad of great **gods**, the Trimurti. **Shiva** is called the Destroyer (of evil), but has also the aspect of regeneration. As destroyer he is dark and terrible, appearing as a naked ascetic accompanied by a train of hideous demons, encircled with serpents and necklaces of skulls. As auspicious and reproductive power, he is worshiped in the form of the **shivling** or **shiva linga** (lingam).

Shiva is depicted as white, with a dark-blue throat, with several arms and three eyes. He carries a trident and rides a white bull. His consort is Parvati (Devi).

Out of many **gods** within this tradition, contemporary Hindus worship mainly three "**gods**." This Hindu "Trinity" bears a striking similarity to the personalities of the Christian Trinity, Father, Son and **Holy Spirit: Brahma**, the creator; **Vishnu**, the savior; and **Shiva**, the destroyer and restorer. This Hindu "trinity" works to carry out the continual creation.

Brahma would relate to the **Christian** "Father." Though **Jesus** is considered "Creator" by most **Christians**, ultimately, the Father is "creator."

Jesus represents the "word of his power"-speaking the will and word of the Father causing creation to happen.

Vishnu has an obvious connection to **Jesus** as Savior. That Hinduism considers the need for a savior was a revelation to me. Some Christians might question the validity of this connection. But when "**Jesus**" is recognized primarily as the "nature" and personality of **God**-the name itself being only phonetic-then the stretch becomes tenable.

Shiva connects to the **Christian** "**Holy Spirit**." It is said of the **Christian God**: "You turn man to destruction, and say, 'Return, you children of men'" (**Psalm 90:3**). Early twentieth century **Christian** writer Oswald Chambers, referring to this facet of the nature of **God** said, "**God** destroys unto salvation." This polarity was considered by the prophet Hosea, sent to ancient **Israel**: "Those who dwell under his shadow shall return..." (**Hosea 14:7**). The Benjamite and apostle Paul saw the destructive power of **God** and his call to return: "For **God** has committed them all to disobedience, that he might have mercy on all" (**Romans 11:32**). St. Paul so trusted the nature of **God** to pull this off he stated dogmatically: "And so all **Israel** shall be saved" (**Romans 11:26**).