

Common Hindu Deities

There are many gods, or deities, represented in Hindu ideology. The gods are often portrayed with many arms and multiple heads. The reason for this is because Hindus believe that the gods are everywhere and they do things at the same time. These portrayals of the gods appeared in India more than 2000 years ago.

Brahama speaks the world into existence “creates”

Shiva has many personalities. Divine ascetic, lives in Himalayas, carries trident, ascetic’s water gourd & other things.

- Patron god of dancers & musicians
- Has a domestic side
- Mahadeva “Great god”
- Nataraja “Lord of the Dance”

Vishnu or Narayan

- Carries a discus, a mace, and a conch (military devices)
- Sustains life in the universe during periods of time in which the world comes in & out of time periodically.
- Idea of incarnation—the divine takes human form. Vishnu has many incarnations. Any time the world is in danger, Vishnu intervenes to save it by taking on the necessary human form.

Rama is a blue god with a bow & arrow. He saves the world and has adventures. There are many stories about Rama that are told in the Ramayana stories, some of which see Rama as disruptive deity and people try to avoid him.

Krishna Avatara

- Krishna as divine child (butter baby)
- Krishna as symbol of divine lover
- Krishna as Sage-Hero of Mahabharata, 2nd great Hindu epic

DEVI: goddess -- Bodily connection to trees causing it to bloom

- Incarnations as personifications of woman’s virtue

Lakshmi: goddess of wealth

Sarasvati: goddess of learning and arts; married to Brahma

Women’s dharma is to submit to men; male domination. In art, male gods are shown above and standing out from the female goddesses, which are dimmer & in the background.

Durga and Kali: Incarnation of feminine power (Shakti)

- Durga is married to Shiva
- Kali forces us to look at death directly & become in harmony with death
- The theology of Kali helps to re-center the harmony between male & female power