THE HINDU TRIAD

Bhagavan

The most explicit form of monotheistic worship of the personal God Swayam 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 shinned 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).