

## The Hindū Trimūrti



*Brahma, from Haccappyagudi Temple, Aihole, c. A.D. 500*

### Brahmā

The one impersonal universal Spirit manifested as a personal Creator and as the first of the triad of personal gods; he never appears to have become an object of general worship though he has two temples in India; his wife is Sarasvatī. (*Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*)

The possibility of a form, of a perceptible reality, depends on the existence of a “place” where it can appear and expand, that is, on the existence of an oriented medium (in our world space-time) which is the result of an equilibrium between two opposites, between the centripetal and the centrifugal principles. It is a balance between concentration and dispersion, between a tendency toward existence and a tendency toward annihilation, between light and darkness, between Viṣṇu and Śiva.

The source of the manifest world is therefore neither Viṣṇu nor Śiva, neither concentration nor dispersion, but the result of their opposition, their equilibrium, the third tendency called rajas. The Immense-Being (Brahmā), masculine or personified form of the Immensity (brahman), represents the possibility of existence resulting from the union of opposites. Hence Brahmā is the source, the seed, of all that is. (*The Myths and Gods of India*, p. 233)

## Viṣṇu

Although Viṣṇu comes second in the triad he is identified with the supreme deity by his worshipers; in the Vedic period, however, he is not placed in the foremost rank, although he is frequently invoked with other gods [esp. with Indra, whom he assists in killing Vṛtra and with whom he drinks the Soma juice; cf. his later names Indrānuja and Upendra]; as distinguished from the other Vedic deities, he is a personification of the light and of the sun, esp. in his



*Vishnu Anantashayana, from Mahamallapuram. 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D.*

striding over the heavens, which he is said to do in three paces, explained as denoting the threefold manifestations of light in the form of fire, lightning, and the sun or as designating the three daily stations of the sun in his rising, culminating and setting; Viṣṇu does not appear to have been included at first among the Ādityas although in later times he is accorded the foremost place among them; in the Brāhmaṇas he is identified with sacrifice and in one described as a dwarf; in the Mahā-bhārata and Rāmāyaṇa he rises to the supremacy which in some places he now enjoys as the most popular deity of modern Hindū worship; the great rivalry between him and Śiva is not fully developed till the period of the Purāṇas: the distinguishing feature in the Post-vedic Viṣṇu is his condescending to become incarnate in a portion of his essence on ten principal occasions, to deliver mankind from certain great dangers; some of the Purāṇas make 22 incarnations, or even 24, instead of 10; the Vaishṇavas regard Viṣṇu as the supreme being, and often identify him with Nārāyaṇa, the personified Puruṣa or primeval living spirit [described as moving on the waters, reclining on Śeṣha, the serpent of infinity, while the god Brahmā emerges from a lotus growing from his navel]; the wives of Viṣṇu are Aditi and Sinīvālī, later Laksmī or Śrī and even Sarasvatī; his son is Kāma-deva, god of love, and his paradise is called Vaikuṅṭha; he is usually represented with a peculiar mark on his breast called Śrī-vatsa, and as holding a śaṅkha or conch-shell called Pāñcajanya, a cakra or quoit-like missile-weapon called su-dar-śana, a gadā or club called Kaumodakī, and a padma or lotus; he has also a bow called Śārṅga, and a sword called Nandaka; his vāhana or vehicle is Garuḍa; he has a jewel on his wrist called Syamantaka, another on his breast called Kaustubha, and the river Ganges is said to issue from his foot; the demons slain by him in his character of 'preserver from evil,' or by Kṛishṇa as identified with him; he is worshiped under a thousand names, which are all enumerated in the Mahābhārata. (*Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*)



## Śiva

The disintegrating or destroying and reproducing deity. In the Veda the only name of the destroying deity was Rudra 'the terrible god,' but in later times it became usual to give that god the euphemistic name Śiva as developed in the Purāṇas and Epic poems led to his being identified with the Supreme Being by his exclusive worshippers [called Śaivas]; in his character of destroyer he is sometimes called Kāla 'black,' and is then also identified with 'Time,' although his active destroying function is then oftener assigned to his wife under her name Kālī, whose formidable character makes her a general object of propitiation by sacrifices; as presiding over reproduction consequent on destruction Śiva's symbol is the Liṅga or Phallus, under which form he is worshiped all over India at the present day; again one of his representations is as Ardha-nārī, 'half-female,' the other half being male to symbolize the unity of the generative principle; he has three eyes, one of which is in forehead, and which are thought to denote his view of the three divisions of time, past, present, and future, while a moon's crescent, above the central eye, marks the measure of time by months, a serpent round his neck the measure by years, and a second necklace of skulls with other serpents about his person, the perpetual revolution of ages, and the successive extinction and generation of the races of mankind: his hair is thickly matted together, and gathered above his forehead into a coil; on the top of it he bears the Ganges, the rush of which in its descent from heaven he intercepted by his head that the earth might not be crushed by the weight of the falling stream; his throat is dark-blue from the stain of the deadly poison which would have destroyed the world had it not been swallowed by him on its production at the churning of the ocean by the gods for the nectar of immortality; he hold a tri-śūla or three-pronged trident [also called Pināka] in his hand to denote, as some think, his combination of the three attributes of Creator, Destroyer, and Regenerator; he also carries a kind of drum, shaped like an hour-glass, called Damaru: his attendants or servants are called Pramatha; they are regarded as demons or supernatural beings of different kinds, and form various hosts or troops called Ganas; his wife Durgā [otherwise called Kālī, Pārvatī, Umā, Gaurī, Bhavaṇī &c.] is the chief object of worship with the Śāktas and



*Shiva, Chola Period, copper (A.D. 985-1016)*

Tāntrikas, and in this connection he is fond of dancing [see tāṇḍāva] and wine-drinking; he is also worshiped as a great ascetic and is said to have scorched the god of love [Kāma-deva] to ashes by a glance from his central eye, that deity having attempted to inflame him with passion for Pārvatī whilst he was engaged in severe penance; in the exercise of his function of Universal Destroyer he is fabled to have burnt up the Universe and all the gods, including Brahmā and Viṣṇu, by a similar scorching glance, and to have rubbed the resulting ashes upon his body, whence the use of ashes in his worship, while the use of the Rudraksha berries originated, it is said, from the legend that Śiva, on his way to destroy the three cities, called Tri-pura, let fall some tears of rage which became converted into these beads: his residence or heaven is Kailāsa, one of the loftiest northern peaks of the Himālaya; he has strictly no incarnations like those of Viṣṇu, though, Vira-bhadra and the eight Bhairavas and Khaṇḍo-bā &c. are sometimes regarded as forms of him; he is especially worshiped at Benares and has even more names than Viṣṇu, one thousand an eight being specified in the 69<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Śiva-Purāṇa and in the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Anuśāsana-parvan of the Mahā-bhārata, some of the most common being Mahā-deva, Śambhu, Śaṁkara, Īśa, Īśvara, Maheśvara, Hara; his sons are Gaṇeśa and Kārttikeya. (*Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*)

## Śakti

The energy or active power of a deity personified as his wife and worshiped by the Śākta sect of Hindūs under various names (sometimes only three, sometimes eight Śakti goddesses are enumerated, as follow, Indrāṇī, Vaishṇavī, Śāntā, Brāhmāṇī, Kaumārī, Nārasinhī, Vārāhī, and Māheśvarī, but some substitute Cāmuṇḍā and Cāṇḍikā for the third an sixth of these: according to another reckoning there are nine; others reckon fifty different forms of the Śakti of Viṣṇu besides Lakshmī, some



*Shiva and Parvati*

of these are Kirtti, Kānti, Tusṭi, Pusṭā, Dhṛiti, Śānti, Kriyā, Dayā, Medhā etc. and fifty forms of the Śakti of Śiva or Rudra besides Durgā or Gaurī. . . ; Sarasvatī is also named as a Śakti, both of Viṣṇu and Rudra: according to the Vāyu-Purāṇa the female nature of Rudra became twofold, one half asita or white, and the other sita or black, each of these again becoming manifold, those of the white or mild nature included Lakshmī, Sarasvatī, Gaurī, Umā &c.' those of the dark and fierce nature, Durgā, Kālī etc. (*Monier-Williams Sanskrit-English Dictionary*)