

Hindu Gods

Religions around the world generally fall into two categories:

- **monotheism** – a belief in one god/goddess
- **polytheism** – a belief in many gods/goddesses

Hindus believe that there are three great gods (Māhadevas). These are considered the Trimurti – the three aspects of the universal supreme God known as Brahman.

Trimurti

Lord Brahma is the creator of the universe and all knowledge. He is the first god in the Hindu Trimurti – three gods who are responsible for the creation, preservation and destruction of the world. Brahma grew inside a lotus from the navel of a sleeping Vishnu. He has 4 heads and has the goddess Saraswathi as a companion. Brahma is sometimes depicted with a beard.

Lord Vishnu is the Hindu god who preserves the universe and people. He is the second god in the Trimurti. Hindus believe that he has saved followers by appearing to them in other forms. Vishnu has four arms to represent the four corners of the world.

Lord Shiva is the destroyer of the universe so that new life can come again. He restores the balance between good and evil. Shiva is the third god in the Trimurti.

Tridevi

The Tridevi are goddesses who are equally important. Lakshmi is the wife of Vishnu and travels on a lotus flower. She is the goddess of wealth and success.

Saraswathi is the wife of Brahma and the goddess of learning and wisdom. She also plays the lute.

Finally, Shakti is the mother goddess – the source of all energy, power and creativity in the universe. She represents nature and can be nurturing as well as dangerous.

Other Important Hindu Gods

Ganesh is the son of Parvati and Shiva. He has an elephant's head and a human body. His tusks – one broken and the other unbroken – represent imperfection and perfection in the world. Hindus believe he bestows good fortune and wisdom. They pray to him when they are beginning something new in their lives, e.g. getting married or starting a new job.

Indra is the king of heaven and lord of the gods who maintain the heavens. He wields a thunderbolt, creates thunderstorms and provides rain. Indra wages war against the opponents of the gods and is therefore considered the god of war. The rainbow is referred to as Indra's Bow. He has incredible speed and he is a superb warrior.

Agni is the god of fire. Fire holds a special place in many Hindu ceremonies, including weddings. The sacrifices and offerings made to him go to the other gods as he is a messenger to and from them.

Surya is the sun god. He is depicted as a warrior on a chariot, pulled by seven white horses. Surya is thought to be capable of healing the sick and dispelling darkness by illuminating the world. Hindus believe that placing the sign of the Sun over the main doors in the home will bring them good luck.

Vayu is the god of air and wind. He is also considered to be the god of life as air is vital to being alive. Vayu is also known by the names of Pavana, Vata and Prana. He is the father of Hanuman, who is known as Pavanaputra (son of Pavana). Like other gods, he is considered a powerful and heroic fighter/destroyer.

Hanuman is the Hindu monkey god. It is believed that as a child, Hanuman was mischievous and liked to play tricks. It is for his role in the story of the festival of Diwali that he is best known. He commanded an army to aid Rama's fight against the demon Ravana, in order to rescue Sita.

Krishna is often seen with blue skin, playing the flute and wearing peacock feathers on his head. He is the god of love and the most worshipped of all. Krishna is strong, young, handsome and mischievous.

Garuda is the god of the birds and a messenger from God. He has a human body and the wings of an eagle. Garuda has the ability to carry people to safety.



Hindu Gods Questions

1. What is the difference between monotheism and polytheism?

2. How many heads does Lord Brahma have?

3. Why do you think many Hindu gods have more than two arms and more than one head? Explain your reasoning.

4. Which goddess is the wife of Vishnu?

5. A Hindu who was just about to start a new school might pray to which god? Why?

6. What is the name of the Hindu god of war?

7. Why do many Hindus believe that placing the sign of the Sun over a main door in their home will bring them good luck?

8. Which other names is Vayu known by?

9. 'His tusks – one broken and the other unbroken – represent imperfection and perfection in the world'. Explain your understanding of this sentence in your own words.

10. Which is your favourite Hindu god? Why?
