

THE CONCEPT OF GOD IN HINDUISM

ARTICLE

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The earliest statement of the Nature of Reality occurs in the first book of the Rig-Veda: *Ekam Sat-Viprah Bahudha Vadanti*. "The ONE BEING, the wise diversely speak of."

The tenth book of the Rig-Veda regards the highest conception of God both as the Impersonal and the Personal: The *Nasadiya-Sukta* states that the Supreme Being is both the Unmanifest and the Manifest, Existence as well as Non-existence, the Supreme Indeterminable.

The *Purusha-Sukta* proclaims that all this Universe is God as the Supreme Person—the Purusha with thousands of heads, thousands of eyes, and thousands of limbs in His Cosmic Body. He envelops the whole cosmos and transcends it to infinity.

The *Narayana-Sukta* exclaims that whatever is anywhere, visible or invisible, all this is pervaded by Narayana within and without.

The *Hiranyagarbha-Sukta* of the Rig-Veda declares that God manifested Himself in the beginning as the Creator of the Universe, encompassing all things, including everything within Himself, the collective totality, as it were, of the whole of creation, animating it as the Supreme Intelligence.

The *Satarudriya* or *Rudra-Adhyaya* of the Yajur-Veda identifies all things, the high and the low, the moving and the unmoving, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly, every conceivable thing, with the all-

pervading Siva or Rudra as the Supreme God.

The *Isavasya* Upanishad says that the whole Universe is pervaded by Isvara or God, who is both within and without it. He is the moving and the unmoving, He is far and near, He is within all these and without all these.

The *Kena* Upanishad says that the Supreme Reality is beyond the perception of the senses and the mind because the senses and the mind can visualize and conceive only the objects, while Reality is the Supreme Subject, the very precondition of all sensation, thinking, understanding, etc. No one can behold God because He is the beholder of all things.

The *Kathopanishad* has it that God is the Root of this Tree of world existence. The realization of God is regarded as the Supreme blessedness or *Shreyas*, apart from Preyas or the temporal experience of satisfaction.

The *Prasna* Upanishad says that God is the Supreme *Prajapati* or Creator, who are blended both the matter and energy of the Universe. God is symbolised in Pranava, or Omkara.

The *Mundaka* Upanishad gives the image of the Supreme Being as the One Ocean into which all the rivers of individual existence enter and with which they become one, as their final goal.

The *Mandukya* Upanishad regards the Supreme Being as the *Turiya*, or the Transcendent Consciousness, beyond the stages of waking, dreaming, and deep sleep. The *Taittiriya* Upanishad regards the Reality as the Atman, or the Self, beyond the physical, vital, mental,

intellectual and causal aspects (sheaths) of the personality. It also identifies this Atman with the Supreme Absolute or Brahman.

The *Aitareya* Upanishad states that the Supreme Atman has manifested itself as the objective Universe from the one side and the subjective individuals on the other side, in which process, factors which are effects of God's creation become causes of individual's perception, by a reversal of the process. The *Chhandogya* Upanishad says that all this Universe is Brahman Manifest in all its states of manifestation. It regards objects as real aspects of the one Subject known as the *Vaishvanara-Atman*. It also holds that the Supreme Being is the Infinite, or *Bhuma*, in which one sees nothing else, hears nothing else, and understands nothing else except the Self as the only, existence.

In the *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad, we are told that the Supreme Being is Pure Consciousness, in which subjects and objects merge together in a state of Universality. The Supreme Being knew only Itself as 'I-Am', inclusive of everything. As He is the Knower of all things, no one can know Him, except as 'He Is'. The *Svetasvatara* Upanishad says, 'Thou art the Woman', 'Thou art the Man', 'Thou art Girl', 'Thou art Boy', 'Thou deceivest us as the old man tottering with the stick', 'Thou movest everywhere, in the form of everything, in all directions', 'Thou art the dark-blue Butterfly, and the Green Parrot with red eyes', 'Thou art the thunder cloud, the Seasons and the Oceans', 'Thou art without beginning and beyond all time and space', 'Thou art That from which all the Universes are born'. 'That alone is Fire. That is the Sun. That is Air, That is the Moon, That is also the starry firmament, That is the waters, That is *Prajapati*, That is Brahman.'

That Divine Being, who, though Himself formless, gives rise to various forms in different ways with the help of His Supreme Power for His own inscrutable purpose, and Who dissolves the whole Universe in Himself in the end—may He endow us with pure understanding.

He is the Great Being who shines effulgent like the Sun, beyond all darkness. Knowing Him alone one crosses beyond death. There is no other way of going over there. The One God, Creator of the heaven and

earth, is possessed of all eyes, all faces, all hands, and all feet in this Universe. It is He who inspires all to do their respective functions as if fanning their fire into flames of movement.

Manu says in his Smriti: In the beginning, all this existence was one Undifferentiated Mass of Unmanifestedness, unknown, indefinable, unarguable, and unknown in every way. From this Supreme Condition arose the Universe of name and form, through the medium of the Self-existent Creator, *Swayambhu*.

The Mahabharata says that Narayana alone was in the beginning, who was the Prius of the creative, preservative, and destructive principles, the Trinity known as Brahma, Vishnu and Siva—the Supreme Hari, multi-headed, multi-eyed, multi-footed, multi-armed, multi-limbed. This was the Supreme Seed of all creation, subtler than the subtlest, greater than the greatest, larger than the largest, and more magnificent than even the best of all things, more powerful, than even the wind and all the gods, more resplendent than the Sun and the Moon, and more internal than even the mind and the intellect. He is the Creator, the Father Supreme.

The *Bhagavadgita* in the Mahabharata, says: The Supreme Brahman is beyond existence and non-existence. It has hands and feet everywhere, heads, mouths, eyes everywhere, ears everywhere, and it exists enveloping everything. Undivided, it appears as divided among beings; attributeless, it appears to have attributes in association with things. It is the Light of all lights, beyond all darkness, and is situated in the hearts of all beings.

He is the sacrifice, He is the oblation, He is the performer thereof, He is the recitation or the chant, He is the sacred fire, He is what is offered into it. He is the father, the mother, the grandfather, the support, the One knowable Thing, He is the three Vedas, the Goal of all beings, the Protector, the Reality, the Witness, the Repository, the Refuge, the Friend, the beginning, the middle and the end of all things. He is immortality and death, existence as well as non-existence. He is the Visvarupa, the Cosmic Form, blazing like fire and consuming all things.

According to the Bhagavata and the Mahabharata, God especially manifested Himself as Bhagavan Sri Krishna, who is regarded as the foremost of the divine Incarnations, in whose personality the Supreme Being is fully focussed and manifest. The *Srimad Bhagavata* says: He is Brahman (the

Absolute), Paramatman (God), Bhagavan (the Incarnation).

According to the *Pancharatra Agama* and the Vaishnava theology, God has five forms: the *Para* or the Transcendent, *Antaryamin* or the Immanent, *Vyuha* or the Collective (known as Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha), *Vibhava* or the Incarnation, and *Archa* or the symbolic form of daily worship.

According to *Saiva tradition*, God is *Pañi*, the Lord who controls the individuals known as *Pasu*, with His Power known as *Pasa*.

According to the *Sakta tradition*, God is the Divine Universal Mother of all things, *Adi-sakti*, or the original Creative Power, manifesting Herself as *Kriya-Sakti* or *Durga*, *Ichha-Sakti* or *Lakshmi*, and *Jnana-Sakti* or *Sarasvati*. But the Supreme Mother is beyond all these forms. She is One, alone, without a second.

According to the *Bhakti tradition*, God is the Supreme Object of Love, in respect of Whom love is evinced as in respect of one's father, mother, friend, son, master, or one's own beloved, in the five forms of affection, known as *Shanta*, *Sakhya*, *Vatsalya*, *Dasya* and *Madhurya*.

To the *Vaishnavas*, God is in *Vaikuntha* as *Vishnu*. To the *Saivas*, God is in *Kailasa* as *Siva*, or *Rudra*. To the *Saktas*, God is in *Manidvipa*, as the Supreme *Sakti* or the Divine Mother. To the *Ganapatyas*, God is *Ganesa*, or *Ganapati*. To the *Sauras*, God is *Surya*, the Sun. To the *Kaumaras*, God is *Kumara*, or *Skanda*.

To the saints like *Tulasidas*, God is *Rama*; to those like *Suradas*, He is *Krishna*. To those like *Kabirdas*, He is the Impersonal, Attributeless One, known by various names for purposes of worship and meditation.

All the *Vaishnava* saints worship Him as either *Rama* or *Krishna*, *Narayana* or *Vishnu*. The *Saiva* saints worship Him as *Paramasiva*. The *Saktas* worship Him as *Adi-sakti*. The philosopher-saints worship Him as *Brahman*, the Absolute, as *Isvara*, *Hiranyagarbha*, and *Virat* or the Cosmic Being.

The *Virat-Saivas* worship God as *Siva*, especially manifest as the *Linga* (symbolized in the rounded sacred stone which they wear around their necks).

The symbol of *Vishnu* is the *Saligrama*, the symbol of *Siva*

is the *Linga*, and the symbol of *Devi* is the *Yantra* (sometimes, a *Mantra*).

According to the *Nyaya and Vaisesika schools*, God is the instrumental cause of creation, like a potter fashioning a pot of clay, but not the material cause of creation.

The *Samkhya school* holds that there are only two Primary Principles, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, and creation is only a manifestation or evolution of the constituents of *Prakriti* due to the action of *Purusha's* consciousness. There is no other God than these two Principles.

The *Yoga school* of *Patanjali* accepts God's existence as a Special *Purusha* free from all afflictions, *Karma* the effects of *Karmas* and impressions or potencies of a binding nature. But this *Purusha*, known as *Isvara*, according to *Patanjali's Yoga System*, is not the creator of the world, but a *Witness* thereof. Nor is He the goal of the aspirations of the *Jivas* or individuals.

The *Yogavasishttha* defines Reality as *Consciousness*, which is between and transcends the subjective and objective aspects of perception and cognition, etc. *Consciousness* is the Absolute, *Brahman*, the only existence, of which the world is only an appearance.

The *Brahmasutra* states that God is from Whom this Universe proceeds, in Whom it subsists, and to Whom, in the end, it returns.

Kalidasa, in his *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava*, points out that God is the Supreme Being, is prior to the forms of *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Siva*, who are three aspects or phases of God, and that *Brahma*, *Vishnu*, and *Siva*, being three forms of one and the same Reality, are equal to one another in every respect, without inferiority or superiority among them.

Bhartrihari prays to that Infinite *Consciousness*, which is *Peaceful Effulgence*, which is undifferentiated by the interference of space, time, causal relation, etc., and whose essence is *Self-Experience* alone.

Madhusudana Sarasvati blends *Advaita Vedanta* and *Bhakti-Rasa*, and he is the author of the most polemical and authoritative *Advaita* text, known as the '*Advaitasiddhi*', and of an unparalleled compendium of the various processes and stages of devotion to God,

known as '*Bhaktirasayana*'. His commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* is a monument of a fusion of knowledge of the Impersonal Absolute with devotion to the Personal God.

Religions are founded on a metaphysical rock bottom. There is a philosophical import behind every ethical canon.

Generally, the tradition of worship of deities in India is according to a sort of protocol that devotees associate with the importance of the deities. For instance, worshippers of a particular Deity, such as Ganesa, Siva, Vishnu, Surya, or Skanda, will place their own Deity as the first in importance and every other Deity as secondary. There is another tradition according to which the order of worship places Ganesa as the first, to be worshipped on any occasion, and then Devi, Siva, Vishnu, Surya, and Skanda. This order may get slightly changed in different circles of religious belief. But the discourses recorded in this book do not follow any of these patterns but a chronological arrangement according to the festivals that come one after the other, seriatim, during the course of the calendar of the year, that is, from the beginning of the year to the end of the year. The functions and festivals repeat themselves every year on specific days or dates. Thus, the order in which the functions or the Deities of worship are mentioned here follows their calendar-wise chronology.

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