

# Different forms of the Divine: the trimurti

Brahman is the Hindu concept of Ultimate Reality. All the many Hindu gods and goddesses represent different aspects of Brahman and show Hindus a part of what Brahman is like. Although there are thousands of gods and goddesses in Hindu worship there are three main gods, known as the trimurti, always associated with their consorts (sometimes referred to as *tridevi* by Gujarati Hindus). For very many Hindus, the three 'main' deities are in fact Vishnu, Shiva and Devi.

Here are some introductory details, giving you 12 key words to learn and define.

<p>Brahma the creator</p>		<p>Murtis or images of Brahma have four heads: he sees in all directions at once. The heads symbolise the scriptures called the four Vedas. He holds four symbols of power: a goblet, a bow, a sceptre and the Vedas (sacred writings). In Hindu creation stories Brahma brings this universe into being. There is just one well-known Brahma temple today.</p>
<p>Vishnu the preserver</p>		<p>Images or murtis of Vishnu express splendour and power: four arms carry symbols of power, a discus, a lotus flower, a conch shell and a mace. Vishnu, god of light and enlightenment, has appeared on earth through Avatars – nine already, and one to come. Worshipers of Vishnu (and his avatars, including Krishna) are numbered in hundreds of millions today.</p>
<p>Shiva the destroyer</p>		<p>Don't think of the destructive power of Shiva as negative: he clears the way for the new! Images or murtis of Shiva vary. He is often pictured dancing and with 4 arms. He holds a drum and a flame, pointing to his dancing feet with one hand, and holding the other hand open, to say 'fear not'. His necklace of cobra snakes is another sign of power. Shiva is worshipped by hundreds of millions of Hindu people today. A Shiva Nataraj image shows the god dancing.</p>
<p>Saraswati is the consort of Brahma, the creator.</p>		<p>Saraswati is the goddess of learning, arts, and culture. She symbolises universal intelligence, consciousness and knowledge. She is often seen playing a musical instrument. Her vehicle is a swan. Hindus may worship Saraswati seeking her aid with their studies or their musical skills. She is worshipped at the festival of Saraswati Puja, mainly by Bengali Hindus.</p>
<p>Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu, the preserver.</p>		<p>Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth, fertility, and material fulfilment. Lakshmi does not stand for mere material wealth but the big ideas of prosperity such as magnificence, joy, exaltation, and greatness. Lakshmi is the goddess of wealth and beauty – including inner beauty. She is often pictured holding lotus flowers and with a pot of gold coins pouring from her lap. Worship of Lakshmi is part of the celebration of the festival of Diwali; this is when businesspeople in Gujarat open their new account books.</p>
<p>The goddess Parvati is the consort of Shiva</p>		<p>Parvati is the goddess of power, beauty, love and spiritual fulfilment. Images or murtis of Parvati as the mother goddess show her beauty and her golden skin. She is often surrounded by symbols of love, marriage and fertility.</p>
<p>The goddess Devi</p>	<p>The goddess is also known by many other names and in different forms including Shakti, Durga and Kali. Shakti represents divine feminine energy, carries many weapons and rides a tiger. Durga is the protective mother of the whole universe and fights for goodness, worshipped at Durga puja, Navaratri. Kali, the black goddess, wears a necklace of skulls and her tongue drips blood: she is the goddess of death and doom.</p>	