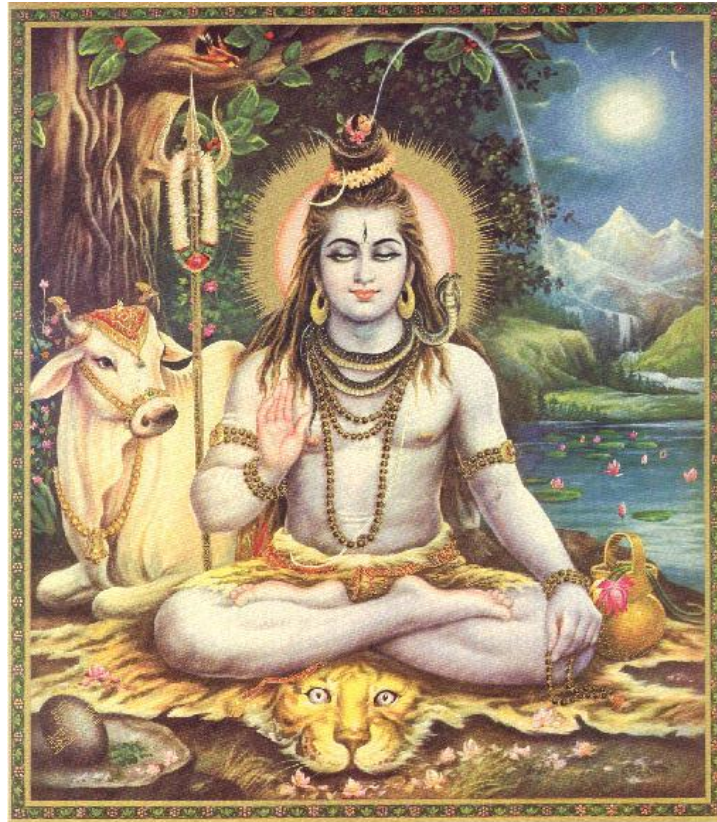


ŚHIVA

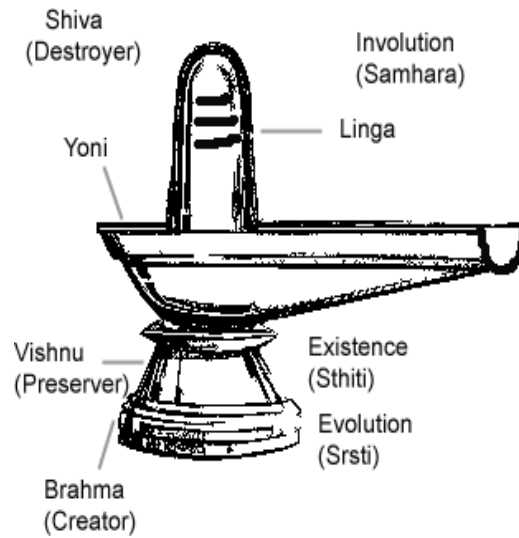
Śhiva (meaning "auspicious one") is the Hindu God of destruction.

Role: The frame of cosmic reality, according to ancient Hindu thought, consists of the three fundamental states called evolution (sruṣṭi), existence (sthithi), and involution (samhāra) that acts in a cyclic process of infinity. Each one of the forms is controlled by a God, named Brahmā (the creator), Viṣṇu (the preserver) and Śhiva (the destroyer); these three Gods are called the Trinity. Śhiva, being the last to complete the cycle from where the new cycle starts, is known as Mahādheva, the Supreme Divinity.



Iconography

Lord Śhiva is usually worshipped in the abstract form of Śhiva liṅga. In images, he is shown as a handsome young man immersed in deep meditation or dancing the Thāṇḍava on Apasmara, the demon of ignorance in his manifestation of Naṭarājā, the Lord of the dance.



The iconographic form of Śhiva, the Liṅga, represents the unity of the three states of cosmos (shown in the above figure). The Liṅga consists of three parts. The first is a square base of three-layers at the bottom showing the three mythical realms (lokas), symbolizing evolution or Brahmā. The second is an octagonal round form in the middle showing the eight directions, symbolizing existence or Viṣṇu and third is a cylinder at the top with a spherical end, symbolizing involution or completion of the cosmic or Śhiva.

The Liṅga also resembles the male sexual organ which is suggestive of the creative power of Śhiva and the circular base resembles the female, suggestive of his consort Pārvathi. It is a phallic symbol representing the union of male and female sexual organs, in a state of conjugal bliss. It also symbolizes the union of the mind and body. Spiritually it represents the union of Puruṣha and Prakruthi. Puruṣha is the individual spirit and Prakruthi is the individual energy level.

As Sadhāśhiva (eternal reality) Śhiva is represented as a lingam, standing for 'total knowledge'. Śhiva is also depicted as cosmic dancer, Naṭarājā, the one who keeps up the rhythm of the world.

Ash: His body smeared with cemetery ash, points to the philosophy of life and death and shows that death is the ultimate reality of life. Most things in the universe reduce to ashes when burned.

Matted Hair: The flow of his matted hair represents Śhiva as the Lord of Wind or Vāyu, who is the subtle form of breath, present in all living beings. It shows that Śhiva is Paśhupathinātha, Lord of All Living Beings.

Gaṅgā: The river Gaṅgā flowing out of his matted hair denotes fertility. It also indicates that Śhiva is not only the Lord of destruction but also bestows knowledge, purity and peace on the devotees. The flow of the Ganges also represents the nectar of immortality.

The Third Eye: The sun is said to be his right eye, the moon the left eye, while fire is his third. While his two eyes indicate his activity in the physical world, his third eye at the center of his forehead looks beyond the obvious. It stands for spiritual knowledge and power, and is thus called the eye of wisdom or knowledge. Like fire, the powerful gaze of Śhiva's third eye can annihilate evil completely.

Half-open eyes: It is the sign of a 'universe of the current cycle. On the other hand, if the eyes are closed, then it is a symbol of the destruction of the universe, and open eyes signify the onset of new creation.

Crescent moon: The crescent symbolizes the time cycle through which creation evolves from the beginning to the end. The moon is a measure of time, and thus the crescent on Lord Śhiva's head signifies his control over time.

Snake: The three coils of the snake symbolize the past, present and future. The snake looking to the right of Śhiva signifies that the Lord's perpetual laws of reason and justice preserve natural order in the universe. The snake is believed to be the Vāsuki, a deadly cobra. The Lord wearing the deadly snake like an ornament signifies that he is independent of time and death. It also suggests the dormant energy, called Kuṇḍalini Śhakthi, which resides within him. His wearing of serpents on the neck denotes wisdom and eternity

Blue throat: The epithet Nīlakaṅṭha (Sanskrit *nīla* = "blue", *kaṅṭha* = "throat") refers to a story in which Śhiva drank the poison churned up from the ocean.

Tiger skin: Lord Śhiva is often shown seated upon or wearing tiger skin, which emphasizes the fact that he is the master of Śhakthi and is beyond and above any kind of force. The tiger is also the emblem of lust. The Lord's sitting on a tiger skin indicates that he has conquered lust. The tiger also represents energy.

The Elephant and Deer Skin: The Lord also wears elephant and deer skins. The elephants stand for pride while the deer represents the flickering mind. Wearing elephant and deer skins show that Lord Śhiva has conquered both vices.

Rudhrāṣha Necklace: He is almost always shown wearing a necklace with 108 beads made from the seeds of the Rudhrākṣha tree. The beads represent the elements used in the creation of the world. The Rudhrākṣha necklace points to the 'Rudhra' aspect of the Lord, which is also his other name. The word 'Rudhra' means "strict or uncompromising" and ākṣha means "eye." It illustrates the fact that Lord Śhiva strictly maintains law and order in the universe.

Ḍamaru (Drum): It is the small hourglass-shaped drum that Śhiva holds in his right hand in a specific gesture called 'Ḍamaru-hastha'. The two sides of the drum separated from each other by a thin neck-like structure represent the two utterly different states of existence, un-manifest and manifest. When a Ḍamaru is shaken, it produces Nādha, the cosmic sound of OM, which can be heard during deep meditation. According to Hindu scriptures, Nādha is the source of creation. This is one of the attributes of Śhiva in his famous dancing representation known as Naṭarājā.

Agni: He holds fire in his left hand. Fire signifies destruction. The opposing concepts in the upper hands show the counterpoise of creation and destruction.

Thriśhūla (Trident): The trident, or the spear with three prongs, is one of the accessories of the Lord and symbolizes his three fundamental powers icchā (will), kriyā (action) and gnyāna (knowledge). It also signifies his power to destroy evil and ignorance. His Thriśhūla represents the three Guṇas—Sattva, Rajas and Thamas. That is the emblem of sovereignty. The Ḍamaru in his left hand represents the Śhabdhha Brahman. It represents OM from which all languages are believed to be formed.

The flames surrounding Naṭarājā represent the Universe. Also, the circle of fire/flames symbolizes the cycle of suffering the ego goes through (endless births and rebirths), before attaining salvation.

Varadha Mudhrā: Lord Śhiva's right hand is shown in a boon- bestowing and blessing pose, which annihilates evil, grants boons, bestows grace, destroys ignorance, and awakens wisdom in his devotees.

Apasmāra: The dwarf on which Naṭarājā dances is the demon Apasmāra (the forgotten and deluded self, or the ignorant darkness and the inauspicious aspects of creation), which symbolizes Śhiva's victory over ignorance. This demon is also known as Muyalagan.

Kamaṇḍalu: The water pot (Kamaṇḍalu) often shown adjacent to the Lord is another of his accessories. It is said to be made from a dry pumpkin and contains Amruth (nectar). Indian Yogis and sages are seen carrying the Kamaṇḍalu as an item of basic necessity. Just as a ripe pumpkin is plucked from a plant, its fruit removed and shell cleaned off its nectar, an individual too must give up his attachment to the physical world and clean his inner self of egoistic desires to experience the bliss of the self. This is what the Kamaṇḍalu symbolizes.

Kuṇḍalas: The Kuṇḍalas refer to the two ear rings, Alakṣhya (meaning "that which cannot be shown by any sign") and Niranjan (meaning "that which cannot be seen by mortal eyes"), worn by the Lord. The ornaments in Śhiva's ears signify that he is beyond ordinary perception. It is noteworthy that the Kuṇḍala in the left ear of the Lord is of the type used by women and the one in His right ear is of the type used by men. The dual Kuṇḍalas represents Śhiva and Shakthi.

Mount Kailāsa: Lord Śhiva is most often shown to be seated with the beautiful Himālayas serving as his backdrop. Mount Kailāsa in the Himalayas is said to be his traditional abode. In Hindu mythology, Mount Kailāsa is said to represent the center of the universe. This denotes that Lord Śhiva is 'Kailāsa' - the bestower of peace and also 'Kailāsādhipathi' meaning "Lord of Mount Kailāsa".

Vehicle: Nandhi is the Bull of Lord Śhiva and is said to be his vehicle. The bull is a symbol both of power and ignorance which suggests that Lord Śhiva removes ignorance in his devotees and gives them the power of wisdom. In Sanskrit a bull is called "Vruṣha" which also means "righteousness". Nandhi seated beside Lord Śhiva indicates that he is the eternal companion of righteousness.

Color: Śhiva is known as "Karpūra Gauram" (Fair like camphor). But his neck is dark blue. Lord Śhiva's body complexion is silver, for which he is attributed as Rajathagirisahniva (Sanskrit: *rajatha* = silver, *giri* = mountain, *sahniva* = resembling, or one who resembles).

Consort: His consort is Goddess Pārvathi and has two sons Lord Gaṇeśha and Lord Muruga.

He is known as *Ardhhanārīśhwara* - "the lord who is half woman". In Hindu philosophy, this is used to visualize the belief that the sacred ultimate power of the universe as being both feminine and masculine. Śhiva and Pārvathi together in one form signifying the unity of *Puruṣha* (form of male) and *Prakruthi* (energy as female).

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