

## VEDIC ERA

Hinduism is an amalgam of three major beliefs : The *aborigines* : Aboriginal people, The *Dravidians* : People speaking Indian languages but who may not be Indo-European natives, The *Indo-Europeans*: Nomad people who invaded India during the second millenium of our Christian era.

### The Vedas : Theoligical Texts

Firstly, the *Indo-Europeans* influenced the cult mainly through their religious traditions. Because of them and the Vedas, we may qualify this era as Vedic. These texts were composed in Sanskrit ( *Indo-European* spoken language ). At this time, they worshipped many gods related to nature.

The Vedas were written around the eighteenth century B.C. and were completed in the seventh century B.C. These texts make up the « laws » governing religious rituals of the Vedic period and they permit the comprehension of the liturgy. We may locate the appropriate words to use, actions to accomplish and finally various divinities.

## YEAR 325 A.D. - BIRTH OF HINDUISM

Hiduisim as we know today manifests itself around 325 A.. The cult of *Trimitri* appears, but already in the third century, sacred texts announce the basis of this religion.

**TRIMITRI: DIVINE TRINITY.** Hinduism includes three great concepts .

### Brahman

Supreme being which is composed of three Hindu divinities : Brahma the Creator, Vishnu and Shiva the Destroyer.

### Brahma the creator

At times represented with four heads, it symbolizes omniscience : who knows and sees all. Brahma is considered to be the father of our world. In

fact, he is the creator or an artisan combining both talent and inspiration to mold matter. A matter that regenerates by creating a sequence of universes. Indeed, according to belief, the universe is eternal. It springs from a sprout, grows, wilts and then dies. When it dies, its elements are used to recreate another universe. Brahma is consequently its originator.

### Vishnu: protecting god

Its mission is to preserve universal harmony or equilibrium. It must combat evil. Vishnu accomplishes missions and manifests itself in various forms. In Sanskrit they are called **Avatars** meaning « descent » or a manifestation of god on earth. Some divine interventions are attributed to this god.

### Eight Most Common Vishnu Avatars

**The fish** (Matsya) : A great flood strikes the earth and annihilates all creatures. One man is saved : Manu. Matsya guides him to Mount Meru which enables him to wait for ebb tide and live through the flood. Manu then learns how to populate the earth and receives the Vedas, sacred writings, knowledge required in order to educate humanity.

**The tortoise** ( Kurma ) : The flood not only destroyed all living things but also the treasures crucial to cosmic harmony. Ambrosia for example required nourishment for the gods and the immortal-heroes. As a tortoise, Vishnu dives into the bottom of the ocean to recover his missing « treasures ».

**The boar** (Vahara ) : As a means of destruction, demons run the new earth under the ocean. Vishnu comes down from Heaven as a boar to bring it afloat.

**The man-lion** ( Narasimha ) : A demon having the capacity of not being able to be killed « at night nor day, by neither man nor animal ». He believes he is invincible and therefore takes advantage of the situation by destroying everything and anything. *Narasimha*'s intervention annihilates the demonic being. Because he is neither man nor animal but both, he waited till dusk where he succeeded in getting rid of this maleficent entity.

*The dwarf Brahmana* ( Vamana ) : The demon *Bali* obtains power on earth and in the universe. The dwarf offered the satirical being the ensemble of his territory he can cover with three strides. *Bali* accepts and Vamana suddenly becomes a huge form, spans the earth and the heavens and on his third stride, Vamana pushes *Bali* into hell.

*Prince and King Ayodha* ( Rama ) : Of royal family, Rama is deprived of his rights and the throne so Providence can be fulfilled. Exiled in the southern woods of India, he becomes allies with the peoples of this region to crush the powers of a demonic king ( Ravana ). This mythological legend is still considered based on a historical event.

*Rama with the axe* ( Parashurama ) : Social balance is tested by an abuse of power from the warrior caste, second element of the Indian population hierarchy. Rama, armed with an axe, descends from Heaven and kills numerous power greedy lords in order to rectify the situation.

*Krishna* : The sacred lands of India are hit by internal wars opposing siblings. During this period, Krishna is born from royal family and is brought up among shepherds. Throughout his life, he acquires wisdom which makes him Prince Arjuna's advisor or counselor. He convinces him to abolish all evil powers in order to restore the Realm of Justice. After carrying off his earthly mission, he dies and returns to Heaven.

### Shiva : Transforming God

Shiva represents two different concepts : destruction and reconstruction . He destroys cosmic universes so Providence can better reconstruct them.

Contrary to Vishnu, there are no avatars. However, the iconography is very rich as to its representations. We often see Shiva's third eye in its illustrations; symbol of the discovery of truth leading to the accomplishment of human kind. The eye is also an element of destruction since it can reduce to dust. A legend relates to the opening of his eye in front of a god thus reducing him to dust.

(Recherche : Musée des religions du monde)