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וישנו (בהינדי: विसुव) הוא אחד משלושת האלים ("טרימורטי") החשובים ביותר ... **וישנו**, Vishnu, ... second member of the Hindu trinity (Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva) called

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وِشَنو

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Vishnumaya

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
(Redirected from Vishnu maya)

Vishnumaya or **Chattan** is a non-Sanskritic deity that is popular among low-status castes in central Kerala.^[1]

Origin

According to Hindu mythology Shiva while on a hunt happened to hear a sweet voice in the jungle. He was surprised to find that it belonged to a tribal girl, "Koolivaka" (Pronounced as Koolivaaka) - a girl of immense beauty. The solitude in that forest area called Koolivanam, and the wild beauty of the forest girl, made the Lord lustful. He informed Koolivaka of his wish and told her to wait for him until he returned from his hunt

Koolivaka, who was a devotee of Parvati realized that mating with lord would bring forth the wrath of the goddess upon her; but she feared the wrath of Shiva also in case she refused him. She prayed to her Goddess to save her from the predicament. Devi (goddess) pleased with her innocence appeared before her and revealed her true identity. In her previous birth Koolivaka was Mansawini, a servant in the retinue of Parvati. One day she happened to breast-feed Ganesha who was a baby at that time. Parvati didn't appreciate the fact of a servant breast-feeding her baby. She cursed Manaswini that she would be born in a chandala(outcaste)family. When Parvati's anger subdued, she took pity on Manaswini. Devi Parvati blessed her that although she be born as a chandala she would get the opportunity to breast-feed the son of Shiva.

Devi disclosed that it was the pre-ordained fate that made possible her meeting with Lord Shiva and his passion for Koolivaka. She told the girl that she herself would take on the form of Koolivaka and deceive the Lord Shiva. She also informed Koolivaka that the son born from such a union would be the killer of Jalandhara, a powerful Asura. Thus revealing the course of fate, she sent the innocent girl away.

The pseudo Koolivaka started swinging on a creeper attached to a jackfruit tree and waited for the arrival of Lord Shiva. A child with divine power was born through their union. Lord Shiva arranged a buffalo for the protection of the child. This divine child who came to be known as Chattan was given to Koolivaka for rearing. Koolivaka thus became the mother of Chattan, son of Lord Shiva fulfilling the boon of Parvati.^[1]

Chattan lived with Koolivaka for about seven years. The tribals loved the boy who saved them from many dangers. He roamed the jungle riding his buffalo and playing a musical instrument known as "Ezhara".

On his seventh birthday, the tribals held a feast in his honour. During the feast the sage, Narada manifested himself. He revealed to Chattan the secret of his birth. Moreover Narada advised Chattan to visit his true parents in Kailasa. He also told Chattan the true purpose of his birth.

Chattan started his journey to Kailasam with the permission of his foster mother and friends. He rode on his buffalo to Kailasam. When he was about to reach Kailasam he realized that Nandikeshwara would not allow him to enter Kailash in his present form. So he took the form of Lord Vishnu. On seeing their son, Shiva and Parvati were very happy and hugged their son. Lord Shiva blessed him saying, "You invoked the form of Vishnu by Maya(magic). So you will be known as Vishnu Maya". Moreover, he taught him the art of warfare and the secrets to kill Jalandhara(an asura who had been harassing the Devas).

Vishnu maya

Devanagari	विष्णु माया
Sanskrit Transliteration	विष्णु माया
Affiliation	Hindu God
Weapon	Magic Wand
Mount	Water Buffalo

Jalandhara was an asura who had got a boon from Indra and he was terrorizing the three worlds (Heaven, Pathala (Nether World) and Earth). Chattan challenged him to battle. After a fierce battle, Chattan took the form of Sudarsana Chakra with his Maya to behead Jalandhara. Sensing danger, he escaped and hid himself in the sea. Chattan as Chakra followed him. Due to the heat of the fiercely revolving Chakra the water where Jalandhar was hiding started to boil. Unable to bear the heat, Jalndhara came out and he was promptly beheaded. Thus came the end of Jalandhara. With the killing of Jalandhara, the power of Chattan was recognized by the Devas. Indra invited him to Heaven. But Chattan declined the offer saying that his place was among the poor people who needed his protection. Chattan returned to his own people.

Another powerful Asura called Briga saw Koolivaka in the forest and wanted to take her as his wife. He had come with a large force and tried to capture her. Chattan along with his trusted follower, "Karinkutty" resisted the attack. Chattan was injured in the conflict. From the blood that fell on the ground, there arose 400 "Kuttiuchattan"s. Sensing his immediate defeat, Briga used ten Brahmastras against Chattan, ten Kuttichattans valiantly swallowed the weapon and gave up their life. The remaining 390 Kuttichattans defeated the army while Chattan killed Briga with his Kuruvadi (short Stick).

References

- ^a ^b *Conversations on the Beach: Fishermen's Knowledge, Metaphor and Environmental Change in South India* (http://books.google.co.in/books?id=OsYDA_jMWacC&pg=PA126&dq=koolivaka&hl=en&sa=X&ei=eQ-YU7qfNI2yuATBIIG4BQ&ved=0CBwQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=koolivaka&f=false). Berghahn Books. 2007. p. 126. ISBN 978-18-4545-015-1.

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Categories: Hindu mythology | Sanskrit words and phrases

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Vishnu

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Vishnu (/ˈvɪʃnuː/; Sanskrit: *Viṣṇu*) is a popular Hindu deity, the Supreme God of Vaishnavism (one of the three principal denominations of Hinduism) and one of the three supreme deities (Trimurti) of Hinduism.^[1] He is also known as Lord Narayana and Lord Hari. As one of the five primary forms of God in the Smarta tradition,^[1] He is conceived as "the Preserver or the Protector"^[2] within the Trimurti, the Hindu Trinity of the divinity.

In Hindu sacred texts, Vishnu is usually described as having dark complexion of water-filled clouds and as having four arms. He is depicted as a blue being, holding a padma (lotus flower) in the lower left hand, the Kaumodaki gada (mace) in the lower right hand, the Panchajanya shankha (conch) in the upper left hand and the discus weapon Sudarshana Chakra in the upper right hand.

Adherents of Hinduism believe Vishnu's eternal and supreme abode beyond the material universe is called Vaikuntha, which is also known as Paramdhama, the realm of eternal bliss and happiness and the final or highest place for liberated souls who have attained Moksha. Vaikuntha is situated beyond the material universe and hence, cannot be perceived or measured by material science or logic.^{[3][4]} Vishnu's other abode within the material universe is Ksheera Sagara (the ocean of milk), where he reclines and rests on Ananta Shesha, (the king of the serpent deities, commonly shown with a thousand heads). In almost all Hindu denominations, Vishnu is either worshipped directly or in the form of his ten avatars, the most famous of whom are Rama and Krishna.^[5]

The Puranabharati, an ancient text, describes these as the dashavatara, or the ten avatars of Vishnu. Among the ten described, nine have occurred in the past and one will take place in the future as Lord Kalki, at the end of Kali Yuga, (the fourth and final stage in the cycle of yugas that the world goes through). These incarnations take place in all Yugas in cosmic scales; the avatars and their stories show that gods are indeed unimaginable, unthinkable and inconceivable. The Bhagavad Gita mentions their purpose as being to rejuvenate Dharma,^[6] to vanquish those negative forces of evil that threaten dharma, and also to display His divine nature in front of all souls.

The Trimurti (three forms) is a concept in Hinduism "in which the cosmic functions of creation, maintenance, and destruction are personified by the forms of Brahma the creator, Vishnu the maintainer, preserver or protector and Shiva the destroyer or transformer."^{[7][8]} These three deities have also been called "the Hindu triad"^[9] or the "Great Trinity",^[10] all having the same meaning of three in One. They are the different forms or manifestation of One person the Supreme Being or Narayana/Svayam Bhagavan.^[11]

Vishnu is also venerated as Mukunda,^[12] which means God who is the giver of mukti or moksha (liberation from the

Lord Vishnu



Lord Vishnu

Devanagari	विष्णु
Sanskrit	Viṣṇu
Transliteration	
Affiliation	Supreme Being, Trimurti
Abode	Vaikuntha, Ksheera Sagara
Mantra	Om Vishnave Namah, Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya, Om Namo Narayanaya, Om Shri Hari Vishnu, Hari Om
Weapon	Sudarshana Chakra, Kaumodaki gada
Consort	Lakshmi
Mount	Garuda

cycle of rebirths) to his devotees or the worthy ones who deserve salvation from the material world.

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Etymology

The traditional explanation of the name *Vishnu* involves the root *viś*, meaning "to settle" (cognate with Latin *vicus*, English *-wich* "village," Slavic: *vas -ves*), or also (in the Rigveda) "to enter into, to pervade," glossing the name as "the All-Pervading One".^[13] Yaska, an early commentator on the Vedas, in his Nirukta, (etymological interpretation), defines Vishnu as *viṣṇur viṣvater vā vyaśnoter vā*, "one who enters everywhere". He also writes, *atha yad viṣito bhavati tad viṣnurbhavati*, "that which is free from fetters and bondages is Vishnu".^[14]

Adi Shankara in his commentary on the *Sahasranama* states derivation from *viś*, with a meaning "presence everywhere" ("As he pervades everything, *vevesti*, he is called *Vishnu*"). Adi Shankara states (regarding Vishnu Purana, 3.1.45): "The Power of the Supreme Being has entered within the universe. The root *viś* means 'enter into'." Swami Chinmayananda, in his translation of Vishnu Sahasranama further elaborates on that verse: "The root *vis* means to enter. The entire world of things and beings is pervaded by Him and the Upanishad emphatically insists in its mantra 'whatever that is there is the world of change.' Hence, it means that He is not limited by space, time or substance. Chinmayananda states that, that which pervades everything is Vishnu."^[15]



A 13th-century Cambodian statue of Vishnu

Sacred texts - Shruti and Smriti

Shruti is considered to be solely of divine origin. It is preserved as a whole, instead of verse by verse. It includes the four Vedas (Rigveda, Yajurveda, Samaveda and Atharvaveda) the Brahmanas, the Aranyakas and the Upanishads with commentaries on them.

Smṛti refers to all the knowledge derived and inculcated after Shruti had been received. Smṛti is not 'divine' in origin, but was 'remembered' by later Rishis (sages by insight, who were the scribes) by transcendental means and passed down through their followers. It includes the Bhagavata Purana and the Vishnu Purana which are Sattva Puranas.^[16] These both declare Vishnu as Para Brahman Supreme Lord who creates unlimited universes and enters each one of them as Lord of Universe.

Shruti

Vaishnava Canon

The Vaishnava canon presents Vishnu as the supreme being, rather than another name for the Sun God, who also bore the name Suryanarayana and is considered only as a form of Vishnu.

Vedas

In the Yajur Veda, Taittiriya Aranyaka (10-13-1), Narayana suktam, Lord Narayana is mentioned as the supreme being. The first verse of Narayana Suktam mentions the words "paramam padam", which literally mean "highest post" and may be understood as the "supreme abode for all souls". This is also known as Param Dhama, Paramapadam, or Vaikuntha. Rig Veda 1:22:20a also mentions the same "paramam padam". This special status is not given to any deity in the Vedas apart from Lord Vishnu/Narayana. Narayana is one of the thousand names of Vishnu as mentioned in the Vishnu Sahasranama.^[17] It describes Vishnu as the All-Pervading essence of all beings, the master of—and beyond—the past, present and future, one who supports, sustains and governs the Universe and originates and develops all elements within. This illustrates the omnipresent characteristic of Vishnu. Vishnu governs the aspect of preservation and sustenance of the universe, so he is called "Preserver of the universe".

Vishnu is the Supreme God who takes manifest forms or avatars across various ages or periods to save humanity from

evil beings, demons or Asuras. According to the extant Hindu texts and traditions, Lord Vishnu is considered to be resident in the direction of the "Makara Rashi" (the "Shravana Nakshatra"), which is about coincident with the Capricorn constellation.^[18] In some of the extant Puranas, and Vaishnava traditions, Vishnu's eye is considered to be situated at the infinitely distant Southern Celestial Pole.^[19]

Following the defeat of Indra and his displacement as the Lord of Heaven or Swarga, Indra asks Lord Vishnu for help and thus Lord Vishnu takes his incarnations or avatars to Earth to save mankind, thus showing his position as Supreme God to all of creation.

In the Puranas, Indra frequently appears proud and haughty. These bad qualities are temporarily removed when Brahma and/or Shiva give boons to Asuras or Rakshasas such as Hiranyaksha, Hiranyakashipu and Ravana, who are then able to defeat Indra in wars between Devas and Asuras. The received boons often made Asuras virtually indestructible.

Indra has no option but to seek help from Vishnu. Indra prays before Vishnu for protection and the Supreme Lord obliges him by taking avatars and generating himself on Earth in various forms, first as a water-dweller (Matsya, fish), then as an amphibious creature (Kurma avatar or Tortoise), then as a half-man-half-animal (Varaha the pig-faced, human-bodied Lord, and Narasimha the Lord with lion's face and claws and a human body). Later, Vishnu appears as human beings (Vamana the short-heighted person), Parashurama, Rama, Krishna, Buddha and finally as Kalki for performing his task of protecting his devotees from demons and anti-religious entities.

Vishnu's supremacy is attested by his victories over those very powerful entities. It is further attested by the accepted iconography and sculptures of Vishnu in reclining position as producing Brahma emerging from his navel. Brahma the creator is thus created in turn by Vishnu out of his own person. Instead Vishnu takes various avatars to slay or defeat those demons. But it is to be noted that Vishnu also provided boons to Akupresura, a bear faced demon who was destroyed by Lord Shiva.^{[20][21]}

Vishnu's actions lowered Indra's ranking among Hindu deities and led to the ascendancy of Vishnu.^[20]

Few temples are dedicated to the Sun or Suryanarayana, nor indeed Indra, nor does Indra figure largely in the Hindu religion.

Indra is almost completely absent from the deities considered as the chief or most important deity.

Rigveda

In the Rigveda, Vishnu is mentioned 93 times. He is frequently invoked alongside other deities, especially Indra, whom he helps in killing Vritra and with whom he drinks Soma. His distinguishing characteristic in the Vedas is his association with light. Two Rigvedic hymns in Mandala 7 are dedicated to Vishnu. In 7.99, Vishnu is addressed as the god who separates heaven and earth, a characteristic he shares with Indra.

The Rig Veda describes Vishnu as younger brother to Indra as Vamana. In Vaishnava canon the 'Vishnu' who is younger brother to Indra is identified as Vamana, Avatar of Vishnu, hence referred to as Vishnu by Vaishnavites.^{[20][22]} Vishnu is the Supreme God who lives in the highest celestial region, contrasted against those who live in the atmospheric or terrestrial regions. Vishnu is content with mere prayer, unlike almost all of the other gods who receive sacrificial offerings such as Havis, which is given using clarified butter, or Soma.^[22] Later foreign translators have view that Vedas place Indra in a superior position to Vishnu's Avatar of Vamana but in fact Vamana helps Indra by restoring his Kingdom.



A 4th–6th century CE Sardonyx seal representing Vishnu with a worshipper. The inscription in cursive Bactrian reads: "Mihira, Vishnu (right) and Shiva".

An alternate translation is provided by Wilson^[23] according to Sayana:

When Thy (younger brother) Viṣṇu (Vamana) by (his) strength stepped his three paces, then verily thy beloved horses bore thee. (Rigveda 8:12:27)^[23]

Wilson mentions Griffith's possible translation as a footnote. However the following verse from Rigveda renders the above translation by Wilson more probable.

*Him whose three places that are filled with sweetness, imperishable, joy as it may list them, **Who verily alone upholds** the threefold, the earth, the heaven, and all living creatures. (Rig veda 1:154:4)^[24]*

Wilson offers an alternate translation for Rigveda 10:113:2:^[25]

Viṣṇu offering the portion of Soma, glorifies by his own vigor that greatness of his. Indra, the lord of heaven, with the associated gods having slain Vritra, became deserving of honour. (Rigveda 10:113:2)

This verse sees Vishnu as one who is glorified by his own strength, while Indra became deserving of honor after having slain Vritra only in association with other gods.

However Vishnu's praise for other gods does not imply worship. Wilson translates:

Viṣṇu, the mighty giver of dwellings praises thee, and Mitra and Varuna; the company of Maruts imitates thee in exhilaration. (Rigveda 8:15:9) (page 280)^[23]

The following verses show categorically Vishnu as distinguished from other gods in Rigveda.

*He who presents (offering) to Viṣṇu, **the ancient, the creator, the recent, the self-born**; he who celebrates the great birth of that mighty one; he verily possessed of abundance, attains (the station) that is to be sought (by all). (Rigveda 1:156:2) (page 98)^[26]*

No being that is or that has been born, divine Viṣṇu, has attained the utmost limit of thy magnitude, by which thou hast upheld the vast and beautiful heaven, and sustained the eastern horizon of Earth.(Rigveda 7:99:2) (page 196)^[23]

The divine Viṣṇu, the best of the doers of good deeds, who came to the pious instituter of rite (Indra), to assist (at its celebration), knowing (the desires of the worshiper), and present at the three connected period (of worship), shows favor to the Arya, and admits the author of the ceremony to a share of the sacrifice. (Rigveda 1:156:5) (page 99)^[26]



12th century stone sculpture of God Vishnu flanked by two apsaras one with a fan (left) and the other with Tambura (right).

Jan Gonda, the late Indologist, states that Vishnu, although remaining in the background of Indra's exploits, contributes by his presence, or is key to Indra's success. Vishnu is more than a mere companion, equal in rank or power to Indra, or sometime the one who made Indra's success possible.

Descriptions of Vishnu as younger to Indra are found in only the hymns to Indra, but in a kathenotheism religion like that of the Rigveda, each god, for a time, is supreme in the mind of the devotee.

In the Rig Vedic texts, the deity or god referred to as Vishnu is the Sun God, who also bears the name 'Suryanarayana'. By contrast, the 'Vishnu' referred to in 'Vishnu Purana', 'Vishnu Sahasranamam' and 'Purusha Sooktham' is Lord Narayana, the Consort of Lakshmi. Vaishnavites make a further distinction by extolling the qualities of Vishnu by highlighting his differences from other deities such as Shiva, Brahma or Surya.^[20]

Three steps

Hymn 7.100 refers to the celebrated 'three steps' of Vishnu (as Trivikrama) by which he strode over the universe and in three places planted his step. The 'Vishnu Suktam' (RV 1.154) says that the first and second of Vishnu's strides (those encompassing the earth and air) are visible to men and the third is in the heights of heaven (sky). This last place is described as Vishnu's supreme abode in RV 1.22.20:

The princes evermore behold / that loftiest place where Vishnu is / Laid as it were an eye in heaven.(trans. Griffith)

Griffith's "princes" are the *sūri*, either "inciters" or lords of a sacrifice, or priests charged with pressing the Soma. The verse is quoted as expressing Vishnu's supremacy by Vaishnavites.

Though such solar aspects have been associated with Vishnu by tradition as well as modern-scholarship, he was not just the representation of the sun, as he moves both vertically and horizontally.

In hymns 1.22.17, 1.154.3, 1.154.4 he strides across the earth with three steps, in 6.49.13, 7.100.3 strides across the earth three times and in 1.154.1, 1.155.5,7.29.7 he strides vertically, with the final step in the heavens. The same Veda also says he strode wide and created space in the cosmos for Indra to fight Vritra. By his stride he made dwelling for men possible, the three forming a symbolic representation of the dwelling's all-encompassing nature. This nature and benevolence to men were Vishnu's enduring attributes. As the triple-strider he is known as Trivikrama and as Urukrama, for the strides were wide.

Brahmanas

The Brahmanas are commentaries on the Vedas and form part of the Shruti literature. They are concerned with the detail of the proper performance of rituals. In the Rigveda, Shakala Shakha: Aitareya Brahmana Verse 1 declares: *agnir vai devānām ava mo viṣṇuḥ paramus, tadantareṇa sarvā anyā devatā* - Agni is the lowest or youngest god and Vishnu is the greatest and the highest God.

The Brahmanas assert the supremacy of Lord Vishnu, addressing him as "Gajapati", the one whom all sacrifices are meant to please. Lord Vishnu accepts all sacrifices to the demigods and allots the respective fruits to the performer. In one incident, a demonic person performs a sacrifice by abducting the Rishis (sages), who meditate by constantly chanting God's name. The sacrifice is meant to destroy Indra. But the rishis, who worship Indra as a demigod, alter one pronunciation of the Veda Mantra, reversing the purpose of the sacrifice. When the fruit of the sacrifice is given and



Vishnu Bronze, 10th-11th century, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

the demon is on the verge of dying, he calls to Vishnu, whom he addresses as Supreme Godhead and "the father of all living entities including himself".

Aitareya Brahmana 1:1:1 mentions Vishnu as the Supreme God. But in the Vaishnava canon, in different ages, with Vishnu in different avatars, his relationship with the asuras or demons, was always adversarial. The asuras always caused harm, while the sages and devas or celestial beings, did penance and called to Vishnu for protection. Vishnu always obliged by taking an avatar to vanquish the asuras. In the Vaishnava canon, Vishnu never gave or granted any boons to the asuras, distinguishing him from the gods Shiva and Brahma, who did. He is the only God called upon to save good beings by defeating or killing the asuras.^[20]

Sayana writes that in Aitareya Brahmana 1:1:1 the declaration *agnir vai devānām avamo viṣṇuḥ paramus, tadantareṇa sarvā anyā devatā* does not indicate any hierarchy among gods. Even in Rigveda Samhita, avama and parama are not applied to denote rank and dignity, but only to mark place and locality.

In Rigveda 1:108:9,: *yadindrāghnī avamasyām pṛthivyām madhyamasyām paramasyāmuta sthaḥ* | i.e., in the lowest place, the middle (place), and the highest (place). Agni, the fire, has, among the gods, the lowest place; for he resides with man on the earth; while the other gods are either in the air, or in the sky. Vishnu occupies the highest place. The words *avama* and *parama* are understood as 'First' and 'Last' respectively. To support this claim, Sayana adduces the mantra (1.4. As'val. Sr. S. 4, 2), *agnir mukham prathamam devathanam samathanam uttamo vishnur asit*, i.e., Agni was the first of the deities assembled, (and) Vishnu the last.

In the Kausitaki Brahmana (7.1) Agni is called Aaradhya (instead of avama), and Visnu parardha (instead of parama), i.e., belonging to the lower and higher halves (or forming the lower and higher halves).^[27] The Vishnu Purana gives tremendous importance to the worship of Vishnu and mentions that sacrifices are to begin only with both the lighting of fire or 'Agni', pouring of sacrificial offerings to Vishnu in 'Agni' so that those offerings reach and are accepted by Vishnu. Worship of Vishnu through Yajnas (or Homams) and other rituals, will not achieve the desired result if Agni's role is neglected.^[20]

Muller says "Although the gods are sometimes distinctly invoked as the great and the small, the young and the old (Rig veda 1:27:13), this is only an attempt to find the most comprehensive expression for the divine powers, and nowhere is any of the gods represented as the subordinate to others. It would be easy to find, in the numerous hymns of the Veda, passages in which almost every single god is represented as supreme and absolute."^[28]

However this notion is not completely correct as per the following verses, which shows Rigveda describe one or more gods as subject to other god(s).

Him whose high law not Varuna nor Indra, not Mitra, Aryaman, nor Rudra breaketh, Nor evil-hearted fiends, here for my welfare him I invoke, God Savitar, with worship. (Rigveda 2.038.09)^{[29][30]}

I invite to this place, with reverential salutations, for my good, that divine Savita, whose functions neither Indra, nor Varun.a, nor Mitra nor Aryaman nor Rudra nor the enemies (of the gods), impede. (Rigveda 2.038.09)^{[31][32]}



A statue in Bangkok, Thailand depicting Vishnu mounted on his vahana Garuda, the eagle

Smriti

Vishnu Smriti

The Vishnu Smṛti, is one of the later books of the Dharmashastra tradition of Hinduism and the only one that focuses on the bhakti tradition and the required daily puja to Vishnu, rather than the means of knowing dharma. It is also known for its handling of the controversial subject of the practice of sati (self-immolation of a widow on her husband's funeral pyre).^[33] The text was composed by an individual or group. The author(s) created a collection of the commonly known legal maxims that were attributed to Vishnu into one book, as Indian oral culture began to be recorded more formally.^[34]

Bhagavata Purana

Vishnu is the only Bhagavan as declared in the Bhagavata 1:2:11 in the verse: *vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvam yaj jnanam advayam brahmeti paramatmeti bhagavan iti sabdyate*, translated as "Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance as Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavan."^[35]

Vishnu Purana

In the Vishnu Purana (6:5:79) the personality named Parashara Rishi defines six bhagas:

*aiśvaryasya samagrasya vīryasya yaśasaḥ śriyaḥ
jñāna-vairāgyayoś caiva śannāḥ bhaga itīṅganā*

Jiva Gosvami explains the verse in Gopala Champu (Pūrva 15:73) and Bhagavata Sandarbha 46:10:

*jñāna-śakti-balaiśvarya-vīrya-tejām.sy aśeṣataḥ
bhagavac-chabda-vācyāni vinā heyair guṇādibhiḥ*

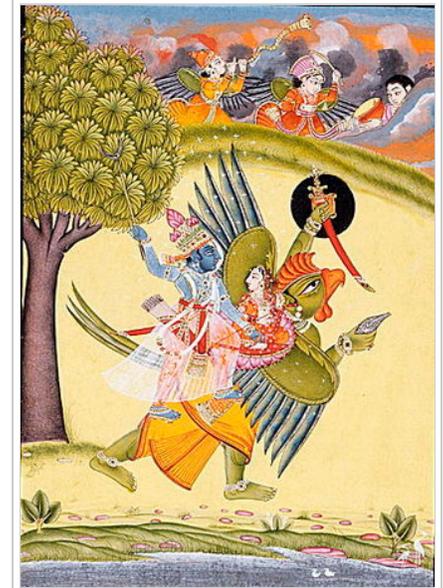
"The substantives of the word bhagavat (bhagavat-śabda-vācyāni) are unlimited (aśeṣataḥ) knowledge (jñāna), energies (śakti), strength (bala), opulence (aiśvarya), heroism (vīrya), splendor (tejas), without (vinā) objectionable (heyair) qualities (guṇādibhiḥ)."

Sangam literature

Tamil Sangam literature (300BCE to 500CE) mentions mAyOn, or the dark one, as the supreme deity who creates, sustains and destroys the universe. Paripadal 3 describes the glory of Thirumal in the most superlative terms.

Paripadal(3)by kaduvan iLaveyinanAr:

"thIyinuL theRal nI poovinuL naaRRa nI kallinuL maNiyu nI sollinuL vaaymai aRaththinuL anbu nI maRaththinuL mainthu nI vEthaththu maRai nI boothaththu madhalu nI vencudar oLiyu nI thingaLuL aLiyu nI anaiththu nI anaiththinut poruLu nI"



Vishnu and Lakshmi riding on Vishnu's Vahana Garuda – Painting from Rajasthan, Bundi, c. 1730 (in Los Angeles County Museum of Art)

The last line states that Lord Vishnu is the supreme deity who is the inner controller (Antaryamin) of the entire universe. This is one of the Lord's glories, which is first mentioned in Vedas and later propounded by Alvars in Prabhandams and Sri Vaishnavaita Acharyas in various commentaries

The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple and Vishnu, Lakshmi is mentioned in Tamil works of literature of the Sangam era, including the epic *Silapadikaram* (book 11, lines 35–40):

āyiram virittelu talaiyuṭai aruntirar

*pāyaṛ paḷḷip palartolu tēṭṭa viritiraik kāviri viyaṅperu
turuttit tiruvamar māṛpaṅ kiṭanta vaṅṅamum*

On a magnificent cot having a thousand heads spread out, worshipped and praised by many, in an islet surrounded by Kaveri with bellowing waves, is the lying posture of the one who has Lakshmi sitting in his chest

Theological attributes

The actual number of Vishnu's auspicious qualities is countless, although his six most-important "divine glories" are:

- Jnana (Omniscience); defined as the power to know about all beings simultaneously;
- Aishvarya (Sovereignty), derived from the word Ishvara which means unchallenged rule over all;
- Shakti (Power or Energy), the capacity to make the impossible possible;
- Bala (Strength), the capacity to support everything by will and without any fatigue;
- Virya (Vigour), the power to retain immateriality as the Supreme Spirit or Being in spite of being the material cause of mutable creations;
- Tejas (Splendor), which expresses self-sufficiency and the capacity to overpower everything by spiritual effulgence.^[39]

Other important qualities attributed to Vishnu are Gambhirya (inestimable grandeur), Audarya (generosity), and Karunya (compassion). Natya Shastra lists Vishnu as the presiding deity of the Sṛṅgara rasa.

The Rigveda says: Vishnu can travel in three strides. The first stride is the Earth. The second stride is the visible sky. The third stride cannot be seen by men and is the heaven where the gods and the righteous dead live. (This feature of three strides also appears in the story of his avatar Vamana/Trivikrama.) The Sanskrit for "to stride" is the root *kram*; its reduplicated perfect is *chakram* (guṇa grade) or *chakra* (zero-grade), and in the Rigveda he is called by epithets such as *vi-chakra-māṅas* = "he who has made 3 strides". The Sanskrit word *chakra* also means "wheel". That may have suggested the idea of Vishnu carrying a chakra.



The front-wide of the Ananthapadmanabhaswamy Temple, which is a Lord Vishnu Temple, depicting Him in His Universal "Padmanabha" form, and is considered the wealthiest Temple in the world, with assets estimated potentially to be in terms of trillions of dollars.



The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple is a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu located in Srirangam, Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Srirangam temple is often listed as the largest functioning Hindu temple in the world, the still larger Angkor Wat being the largest existing temple.^{[36][37]} The temple occupies an area of 156 acres (631,000 m²) with a perimeter of 4,116m (10,710 feet) making it the largest temple in India and one of the largest religious complexes in the world.^[38]

Five forms

See also Pañcaratra

In Shree Vaishnavism, another school dating from around the 10th century AD, Vishnu assumes five forms:

1. In the Para Form, Para is the highest form of Vishnu found only in Sri Vaikunta also called Moksha, along with his consort Lakshmi, (and Bhumi Devi and Nila devi, avatars of Lakshmi) and surrounded by liberated souls like Ananta, Garuda, and a host of Muktas (liberated souls).
2. In the Vyuha form, Vishnu assumes four forms, which exercise different cosmic functions and controls activities of living beings.
3. In the Vibhava form, Vishnu assumes various manifestations, called Vibhavas, more popularly known as Avataras from time to time, to protect the virtuous, punish evil-doers and re-establish righteousness.
4. In the Antaryami; "Dwelling within" or "Suksma Vasudeva" form, Vishnu exists within the souls of all living beings and in every substance.^[40]
5. In the Arcavatara or Image manifestation, Vishnu is visible and therefore easily approachable by devotees since Para, Vyuha, Vibhava and Antaryami forms can only be imagined or meditated upon because they are beyond our reach. Such images can be
 1. Revealed by Vishnu, for example, a self-manifested (Swayambhu) icon (murti), e.g. The Mahavishnu Temple at Tirunelli, The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple at Srirangam, The Tirumala Venkateshwara Temple, etc.; or
 2. Installed by Devas or celestial beings such as such as Guruvayur Temple installed by Vayu; or
 3. Installed by humans, and consecrated according to Vaishnava Agama shastras or scriptures such as Lord Jagannatha of Jagannath Temple (Puri) at Puri.^[41]



Vishnu (Beikthano in Burmese) on his mount, the garuda, in the traditional Burmese depiction.

Relations with deities

Shiva

The three gods of the Trimurti clan are inseparable and in harmony in view of their common vision and universal good. They are perfectly ideal in all respects.

Both Asuras and Devas played supportive roles in this story by keeping company with Vishnu in his incarnated forms. Hanuman is a vanara who is completely dedicated to Rama. He gives Vishnu company and obeys his command, while playing an important part in Rama's life. He is regarded in Vaishnava canon because it is through blessings that Hanuman is born. Thus, Hanuman, Vishnu's constant companion, with his idol appearing temples of Rama, Krishna and Narasimha, i.e. all of Vishnu's avatars, is considered by Vaishnavas.^[42]

Syncretic forces produced stories in which the two deities were shown in cooperative relationships and combined forms. Harihara is the name of a combined deity form of both Vishnu (Hari) and Shiva (Hara).^[43] This dual form,

which is also called Harirudra, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.^[44]

Lakshmi

Vishnu's consort is Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth (also known as Maya). The Samvit (the primary intelligence/dark matter) of the universe is Vishnu, while the other five attributes emerge from this samvit and hence Maya or dark energy of the universe is Lakshmee is his ahamata, activity, or Vishnu's Power. This power of God, Maya or Shakti, is personified and has multiple names: Shree, Lakshmi, Maya, Vishnumaya or Mahamaya. She is said to manifest as Kriyashakti, (Creative Activity) and Bhutishakti (Creation). This world requires Vishnu's creativity. He therefore needs Lakshmi to always be with Him. Her various avatars as Lord Vishnu's consorts are Varahavatar (Bhoodevi) or Bhoomi, Ramavatar Seeta, Krishnavatar Rukmini)

Saraswati and Ganga

According to Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Lord Vishnu had three wives Lakshmi, Saraswati and Ganga. Due to their constant quarrelsome nature among them. Once Ganga tried to be close with Vishnu, this rebuked Saraswati but Lakshmi tried to pacify them but faced a curse rather. As per the curse, Lakshmi to appear as Tulasi. Sarawati cursed Ganga to run as a river in the world and Saraswati was cursed to run as a river in the netherworld. After this, Lord Vishnu transformed and became Brahma and Shiva to pacify Saraswati and Ganga.

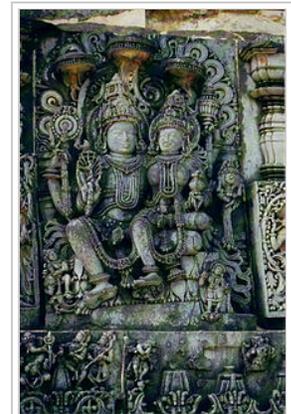
Garuda

Vishnu's mount (*Vahana*) is Garuda, the eagle. Vishnu is commonly depicted as riding on his shoulders.

Iconography

According to various Puranas, Vishnu is the ultimate omnipresent reality and is shapeless and omnipresent. However, a strict iconography governs his representation, whether in pictures, icons, or idols:

- He has four arms and is male: The four arms indicate his all-powerful and all-pervasive nature. His physical existence is represented by the two arms in the front, while the two arms at the back represent his presence in the spiritual world. The Upanishad *Gopal Uttartapani* describes the four arms.
- The *Shreevatsa* mark is on his chest, symbolizing his consort Lakshmi.
- He wears the auspicious "Kaustubha" jewel around his neck and a garland of vaijayanti flowers (Vanamala). Lakshmi dwells in this jewel, on Vishnu's chest.
- A crown adorns his head: The crown symbolizes his supreme authority. This crown sometimes includes a peacock feather, borrowing from his Krishna-avatar.
- He wears two earrings: The earrings represent inherent opposites in creation — knowledge and ignorance; happiness and unhappiness; pleasure and pain.
- He rests on Ananta, the immortal and infinite snake.



Vishnu with Lakshmi (*Lakshmi-Narayana*) at Halebidu.



Vishnu

Vishnu is always to be depicted holding four attributes:

- A conch shell or *Shankha*, named *Panchajanya*, is held by the upper left hand. It represents Vishnu's power to create and maintain the universe. Panchajanya represents the five elements or *Panchabhoota* – water, fire, air, earth and sky or space. It also represents the five airs or Pranas that are within the body and mind. The conch symbolizes that Vishnu is the primeval Divine sound of creation and continuity. It also represented as Om. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna avatara states that of sound vibrations, 'He is Om'.
- The Chakra, a sharp, spinning, discus-like weapon, named "Sudarshana", is held by the upper right hand. It symbolizes the purified spiritualized mind. The name *Sudarshana* is derived from two words – *Su*, which means *good*, *superior*, and *Darshana*, which means *vision* or *sight*; together. The Chakra represents destruction of ego in the awakening and realization of the soul's original nature and god, burning away spiritual ignorance and illusion, and developing higher spiritual vision and insight to realize god.
- A mace or *Gada*, named "Kaumodaki",^[45] is held by the lower right hand. It symbolizes that Vishnu's divine power is the source of all spiritual, mental and physical strength. It also signifies Vishnu's power to destroy materialistic or demonic tendencies (Anarthas) that prevent people from reaching god. Vishnu's mace is the power of the Divine within us to spiritually purify and uplift us from our materialistic bonds.
- A lotus flower or Padma is held by the lower left hand. It represents spiritual liberation, Divine perfection, purity and the unfolding of Spiritual consciousness within the individual. The lotus opening its petals in the light of the Sun is indicative of the expansion and awakening of our long dormant, original spiritual consciousness in the light of god. The lotus symbolizes that god is the power and source from which the universe and the individual soul emerges. It also represents Divine Truth or Satya, the originator of the rules of conduct or Dharma, and Divine Vedic knowledge or Jnana. The lotus also symbolizes that Vishnu is the embodiment of spiritual perfection and purity and that He is the wellspring of these qualities and that the individual soul must seek to awaken these intrinsic Divine qualities from Vishnu by surrendering to and linking with Him.



Vishnu reclining on the Shesha Naga with his consort Lakshmi massaging his feet.

To this may be added, conventionally, the vanamaala flower garland, Vishnu's bow (Shaarnga/Kodand) and his sword Nandaka. A verse of the Vishnu Sahasranama stotram states;*vanamālī gadhī shārngī shanki chakri cha nandaki / shrīmān nārāyaṇo viṣṇo vāsudevo abhirakṣatu//*; translation: Protect us Oh Lord Narayana who wears the forest garland, who has the mace, conch, sword and the wheel. And who is called Vishnu and the Vasudeva.

In general, Vishnu's body is depicted in one of the following three ways:

- Standing on a lotus flower, often with Lakshmi, his consort, beside him on a similar pedestal.
- Reclining on the coiled-up thousand-hooded *Shesha Naga*, with Lakshmi seated at his feet; the assemblage rests on the "Kshira Sagar" (ocean of milk). In this representation, Brahma is depicted as sitting on a lotus that grows out of Vishnu's navel.
- Riding on the back of his eagle mount, known as Garuda. Another name for Garuda is "Veda atma"; Soul of the Vedas. The flapping of his wings symbolizes the power of the Divine Truth of Vedic wisdom. Also the eagle represents the soul. Garuda carrying Vishnu symbolizes the soul or jiva atma carrying the Super soul or Param

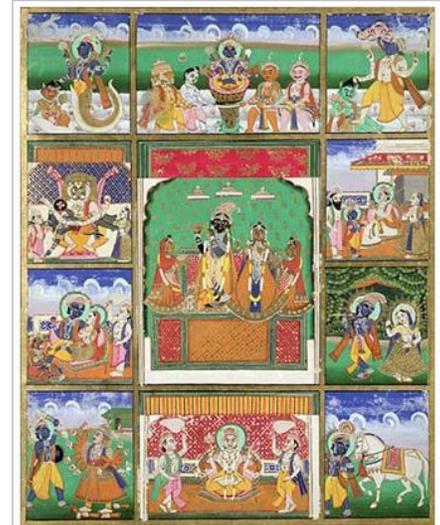
atma within it.

Avatars

Ten avatars (*dashavatara*) of Vishnu are the most prominent:^{[46][47]} Apart from the most prominent incarnations there are believed to more.

The most commonly believed incarnations of Vishnu are:

1. **Matsya**, the fish that kills Damanaka to save the vedas and also saves Manu from a great flood that submerges the entire Earth.
2. **Kurma**, the turtle that helps the Devas and Asuras churn the ocean for the nectar of immortality.
3. **Varaha**, the boar that rescues the Earth and kills Hiranyaksha.
4. **Narasimha**, the half-lion half human, who defeats the demon Hiranyakashipu.
5. **Vamana**, the dwarf that grows into a giant to save the world from King Bali.
6. **Parashurama**, "Rama of the battle axe", a sage who appeared in the Treta Yuga. He killed Kartavirya Arjuna's army and clan and then killed all the kshatriyas 21 times.
7. **Rama**, the prince and king of Ayodhya who killed the Demon King Raavan.
8. **Krishna**, the eighth avatar of Vishnu, who takes part in the Mahabharata epic. Krishna is worshipped as the Supreme Avatar of Vishnu (Supreme Personality of Godhead) in Gaudiya-Vaishnava philosophy.
9. **Buddha**, the ninth avatar of Vishnu.^[48]
10. **Kalki**, the tenth Avatar of Vishnu and said to be the harbinger of the end Kali Yuga. This avatar of Vishnu is yet to come.



Ten avatars of Vishnu (Matsya, Kurma, Varaha, Vamana, Krishna, Kalki, Buddha, Parshurama, Rama and Narasimha). Painting from Jaipur, now at the Victoria and Albert Museum

Some versions of the above list include Hayagreeva among the Dashavatara while some include Buddha as ninth avatar of Vishnu. Another 22 avatars are given in Chapter 3, Canto 1 of the Bhagavata Purana, although it states that "the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water".

Beyond Hinduism

Sikhism

Guru Granth Sahib of Sikhism mentions Vishnu, one verse goes:-

The true Vaishnaav, the devotee of Vishnu, is the one with whom God is thoroughly pleased. He dwells apart from Maya. Performing good deeds, he does not seek rewards. Spotlessly pure is the religion of such a Vaishnaav; he has no desire for the fruits of his labors. He is absorbed in devotional worship and the singing of Kirtan, the songs of the Lords Glory. Within his mind and body, he meditates in remembrance on the Lord of the Universe. He is kind to all creatures. He holds fast to the Naam, and inspires others to

chant it. O Nanak, such a Vaishnaav obtains the supreme status.^[49]

Buddhism

While some Hindus consider Buddha as an incarnation of Vishnu, Buddhists in Sri Lanka venerate Vishnu as the custodian deity of Sri Lanka and protector of Buddhism. Lord Vishnu is also known as upulvan, or uthpala varna, meaning "Blue Lotus coloured". Some postulates that Uthpala varna was a local deity who later merged with Vishnu while another belief is that Uthpala Varna was an early form of Vishnu before he became a supreme deity in Puranic Hinduism. According to Chronicles "Mahawamsa", "Chulawamsa" and folklore in Sri Lanka, Buddha himself handed over the custodianship to Vishnu. Others believe that Buddha entrusted this task to Sakra(Indra) and Sakra delegated this task of custodianship to god Vishnu.^[50] In contrary to vedic Hinduism, in assimilation of Hindu god Vishnu into Sinhalese Buddhism, Vishnu becomes a mortal being and a Bodhisattva aspiring Buddhahood. Additionally, Vishnu is considered as the god of home and hearth representing mercy, goodness, order and stability. Many Buddhist and Hindu shrines are dedicated to Vishnu in Sri Lanka. In addition to specific Vishnu "Kovils" or "devalayas", all Buddhist temples necessarily house shrine rooms (Devalayas) closer to the main Buddhist shrine dedicated to Vishnu.^[51] John Holt in his groundbreaking study examines the assimilation, transformation, and subordination of the Hindu deity Vishnu within the contexts of Sri Lankan history and Sinhala Buddhist religious culture. He then explores the role and rationale of medieval Sinhala kings in assimilating Vishnu into Sinhala Buddhism.^[52] According to Holt the veneration of Vishnu in Sri Lanka is evidence of a remarkable ability, over many centuries, to reiterate and reinvent culture as other ethnicities have been absorbed into their own. Though the Vishnu cult in Ceylon was formally endorsed by Kandyan kings in early 1700s, Holt states that Vishnu images and shrines are among conspicuous ruins in the medieval capital Polonnaruwa. In Buddhist mythology, when Vishnu failed to traverse the universe in three steps, he was given the title "Ardha Vishnu (Half-Vishnu)" and when Vishnu banished demons from the Vaishali (Vishala)in India, he became "Mulu Vishnu or Whole Vishnu". The extreme significance of god Vishnu in Sinhala society is reflected in recitals of the traditional "Offerings to dwarfs and crossing the door frame (bahirwayanta dola pideem saha uluwahu peneema)" that starts with Sri Vishnu invocation. In the recitals, mentioning of the aspiring Buddhahood of Vishnu which is of prime importance to Buddhists and wishes for him to live five thousand and more years highlight the central role of Vishnu in the psyche of Sri Lankan Buddhists.^[53]



Uthpalawarna Vishnu Devalaya in Devinuwara, Matara, Sri Lanka

Others

James Freeman Clarke,^[54] Richard Leviton,^[55] James Cowles Prichard,^[56] and others have noted the similarities between Vishnu and Ancient Egyptian God Horus.

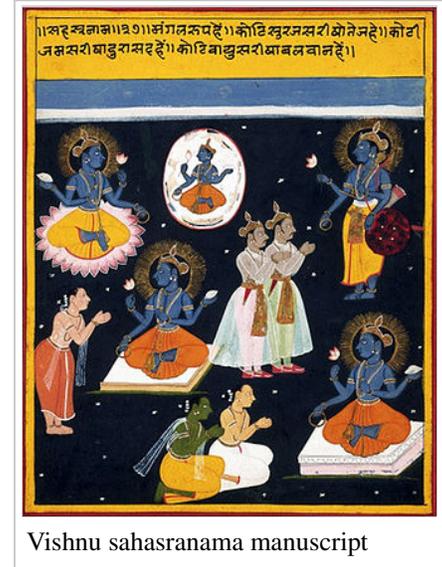
During an excavation in an abandoned village of Russia in the Volga region, archaeologist Alexander Kozhevin excavated an ancient idol of Vishnu. The idol dates from between the 7th and 10th centuries. In the interview Kozhevin, stated that, "We may consider it incredible, but we have ground to assert that Middle-Volga region was the original land of Ancient Rus. This is a hypothesis, but a hypothesis, which requires thorough research."^[57]

Thousand names of Vishnu

Vishnu's many names and followers are collected in the Vishnu Sahasranama, (Vishnu's thousand names) from within the larger work *Mahabharata*. The character Bheeshma recites the names before Krishna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, praising him (Vishnu) as the supreme god. These Sahasranama are regarded as the essence of all Vedas by followers of Vaishnavism, who believe sincere chanting of Vishnu Sahasranama results in spiritual well-being and a greater awareness of God.

The names are generally derived from the *Anantakalyanagunas* (meaning: infinite auspicious attributes). Some names of Vishnu are:

- Aniha—Supreme
- Achintya—Incomprehensible, beyond understanding, also interpreted as remover of all worries from devotees
- Achyutha—infallible
- Akshaja
- Amara—immortal, deathless
- Ananta—endless, eternal, infinite
- Anirudha—One who is uncontrollable & unstoppable, one amongst the quadruple form (Chatur-Vyuha) of Lord Vishnu (i.e. Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha)
- Balaji
- Brynaam - One who nurtures the natural world
- Damodara—One who was tied with a cord (daama) around his waist (udara) in Krishna avatara by his mother Yasoda, One who has entire universe as his abode
- Govinda—One who is attainable by Vedic chanting, one who is finally known by vedas, Protector of cows
- Hari—One who takes away (all the pains & the material existence of his devotees and destroys sansara for them i.e. gives them moksha)
- Hayagreeva—horse-necked incarnation taken to save vedas
- Jagannatha —owner/Ruler of the world/universe
- Janardana—one who is worshiped for Wealth
- Keshava—one whose Kesa (hair) is long, uncut and beautiful, one who destroyed the asura or demon Keshi in the Krishna avatara, one who is himself the three: kah Brahma; ah Vishnu and Isha Shiva
- Krishna—born during the third epoch or yuga, his deeds range from cow protection (go rakshya) to absolving the earth of sins
- Madhava—Husband (Dhava) of Lakshmi (Ma i.e. Mother), Lord of Knowledge
- Madhusudana—Destroyer of demons Madhu-Kaitabh in order to rescue Brahma
- Narayana—The final refuge of all Nara (Jivas), one who resides (ayana) in all the jivas (nara), one who rests (ayana) on water (nara) within the universe
- Padmanabha—lotus-naveled one, from whose navel sprang the lotus which contained Brahma, who created the universe
- Parthasarathy—charioteer of Arjuna/Partha
- Perumal, Thirumaal, Aravamudhan and Maalavan (in Tamil language)
- Purushottama—The Supreme Purusha or Supreme God
- Ram—born during the second epoch or Yuga, his deeds primarily established the ideal living principles for a man
- Hrishiksha—Lord of the senses or Lord within the heart; "hri" root meaning the heart
- Satyanarayana—combination of Satya and Narayana meaning 'protector of truth'



Vishnu sahasranama manuscript

- Shikhandee—He who wears a peacock feather.
- Sooryanarayana—the one who destroys the evil/sins and who comforts us) described in Vishnu kautuvam, One whose form is Sun
- Shreedhara—One who sustains Lakshmi (Shri), One on whose chest resides Lakshmi
- Shreeman—the pride of Shree or Lakshmi); Often Sriman is combined with the name, Narayana, to form a compound word, Shreeman Narayana.
- Shreenivasa—the abode of Shree) (also specifically referring to his form in the temple at Tirupati). Also the form of Vishnu at Tirupati is well known as Venkateswara.
- Trivikrama—who measured the entire universe in three footsteps in Vamana avatara
- Vishala—immense, The Unstoppable One
- Vamana—who took Vamana avatara to help Indra
- Vāsudeva—One who resides in all living beings and in turn all living beings reside in him, one amongst the quadruple form (Chatur-Vyuha) of Lord Vishnu (i.e. Vasudeva, Sankarshana, Pradyumna, Aniruddha); it also means "the son of Vasudeva", i.e. Krishna
- Shree-eesha—one who has Shree or Lakshmi as his consort / Husband of Goddess Lakshmi
- Guruvayurappan—Lord of Guruvayur (Temple made by Guru Bṛhaspati & Vayu), in Malayalam language.
- Jagannatha—Lord of Jagat or the World.
- Sohama—the most intelligent: the strongest form of Vishnu with a thousand brains

According to the Siddhartha-samhita there are twenty-four forms of Lord Vishnu. The twenty-four forms are

- | | | | |
|---------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| ■ Vasudeva | ■ Madhava | ■ Sridhara | ■ Narasimha |
| ■ Sankarshana | ■ Govinda | ■ Hrishiksha | ■ Janardana |
| ■ Pradyumna | ■ Vishnu | ■ Padmanabha | ■ Hari |
| ■ Anirudha | ■ Madhusudana | ■ Damodara | ■ Krishna |
| ■ Keshava | ■ Trivikrama | ■ Purushottama | ■ Adhokshaja |
| ■ Narayana | ■ Vamana | ■ Achyuta | |

Upulvan, Uthpala Varna - In Sri Lanka, Vishnu is also referred to as Upulvan (Blue Lotus Coloured)

In popular culture

4034 Vishnu is an asteroid discovered by Eleanor F. Helin^[58]

Vishnu rocks are volcanic sediments in Grand canyon. Consequently, the mass formation is also being proclaimed as Vishnu temple.^[59]

See also

Media related to Vishnu at Wikimedia Commons

- Jagannath
- Narayana

- Keshava
- Krishna
- Keshava Namas
- Dashavatara
- Great Architect of the Universe
- List of names of Vishnu
- Mahavishnu

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Maya (illusion)

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Maya or *Māyā* (Sanskrit मया *māyā*^[*]), a term found in Pali and Sanskrit literature, has multiple meanings and can be translated to mean something of an "illusion" (or more accurately a "*delusion*").

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Hinduism

In Vedas, Puranas and Tamil classics

The term *māyā* occurs 70 times in Rigveda and around 27 times in the Atharvaveda; and in all these places Yaska, Sayana, Dayananda Saraswati agree the term means Prajñā, *jnana-vishesha* (specific knowledge).^[1] The term *Asuri-Maya* in the Yajurveda at one place was translated by Uvvat as the "knowledge of the vital air".^[1] With regard to the usage of the word *Maya* in the Rigveda, Radhakrishnan opines it was only used to signify might and power.^[1] Maya as the cause of illusion or as the sense of Avidya (lack of knowledge) has never been used in the Vedas.^[1] According to Monier Williams, Maya meant wisdom and extraordinary power in an earlier language, but later the word came to mean illusion, fraud, deception, witchcraft, sorcery and magic.^[2]

In early Vedic literature, Varuna's supernatural power is called Maya.^[2] Though Indra, Agni, and some other gods are said to have Maya, the first Rigvedic phase exclusively connected Maya with Varuna, who is called

Mayin and Asura.^[2] In the Rig, Indra uses Maya to conquer Vritra.^[3] Monier Williams takes *asu* to mean life of the spiritual world or departed souls. The association of Varuna with *Nritti*, death, thus connects Maya with the power of life of the spiritual world or the departed souls.^[2] Due to *asura's maya*, Varuna is said to send rain, create dawn and envelope the night; and with Mitra, Varuna is personified to protect Earth. Varuna found mention as a companion in Indra's exploits and had several Rigvedic verses dedicated to him. In the seventh mandala of Rigveda, many of Varuna's accomplishments are composed exclusively by Vashista; with Vashistas said to be a clan of Varuna-worshippers.^[2] Varuna is said to be the brother of Soma and instituted the Rajasuya sacrifice.^[2]

However, in the later Rig Vedic phase, Varuna ceased to occupy the position of supremacy and was thence dubbed 'chief of the evil spirits'.^[2] The asuras, now dubbed demons, are said to have lost their *māyā* due to Varuna's power.^[2] With the rise of Prajapati, the *asura māyā* is shared by demons and gods in different forms. Prajapati (and later Vishnu) became identified with the sacrificial rites; and became the sole owner of *asuri māyā*, that is, white magic which benefits gods and men.^[2] The asuras (demons), on the other hand, now wielded black magic to harass the gods (devas).^[2] Since Prajapati was considered the father of Varuna, the asuras consecrated Varuna, although Prajapati's rise in the Brahmanic period made Prajapati the overlord of all kinds of magic power.^[2] In later literature, Varuna was a keeper of Banasura's cattle and was killed by Krishna who intended to plunder the cattle. Before dying, Varuna is said to have sung a hymn for Krishna before finally yielding to his puranic successor.^[2]

In Puranas and Vaishnava theology, *māyā* is described as one of the nine shaktis of Vishnu.^[4] *Māyā* became associated with sleep; and Vishnu's *māyā* is sleep which envelopes the world when he awakes to destroy evil. Vishnu, like Indra, is the master of *māyā*; and *māyā* envelopes Vishnu's body.^[4] The magic creative power, *Māyā* was always a monopoly of the central Solar God; and was also associated with the early solar prototype of Vishnu in the early Aditya phase.^[4]

In Sangam period Tamil literature, Krishna is found as *māyon*;^[5] with other attributed names are such as Mal, Tirumal, Perumal and Mayavan.^[6] In the Tamil classics, Durga is referred to by the feminine form of the word, viz., *māyol*;^[7] wherein she is endowed with unlimited creative energy and the great powers of Vishnu, and is hence *Vishnu-Maya*.^[7] As *Maha-Maya*, she clouds the knowledge of the new born babe bestowing individual ego, ideas of ownership, screening him from wisdom and involving him in pleasures and pain of the transactional world.^[7]

In the Atharva texts, Maya is a prominent deity of the Asuras; while in the Yajurveda the Earth goddess is invoked for universal well being and made *asuri māyā* with offerings.^[8] The Yajurveda also describes *māyā* as an unfathomable plan; and signifies *asuri māyā* to be reachable through the mind in a mysterious process.^[9] In the Aitareya Brahmana Maya is also referred to as Dirghajihvi, hostile to gods and sacrifices, and was killed by Sumitra during an act of purported love making with Indra.^[8] According to Johnston, the Gangetic goddess *māyīā* can be equated with the goddess *māyā* found in Ashvagosha's Saundarananda.^[8] According to V.S Agrawala, the prakrit variants of goddess *māyā* include *mā*, *māyi* and *māyīā*.^[8]

By the time of Upanishads, *māyā* was beginning to acquire five contexts of meanings -- ritual, metaphysical, epistemological, mythological and magical -- all of which related to enigmatic qualities of life and consciousness of life.^[3] While metaphysically and epistemologically, *māyā* points to the process of mental creation and material creation, the theoretical usage of *māyā* allowed for contradiction or rejection of practical usages of *māyā* corresponding to ritual, mythological and magical approaches.^[3] Maya [Shakti] as a power was based on observation and experimentation such that orthoprax priests and ascetics used it in ritual practice with

the understanding of *māyā* as control of life's mysteries.^[3] This also involved the conclusion that austerities (*tapas*) can result in the power to control nature, including gods, acquiring objects of desire, including heaven (*svarga*) and immortality.^[3] In the mythological context, *māyā* was used in the practical sense, such that practices (rituals, austerities, devotion, or a combination of these) gave mortals control over results of the actions (related to *karma*) and hope for future.^[3]

In some Upanishads, such as the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*, *māyā* is designated *prakriti* (nature) and owned by Maheshvara, who as *māyin* is creator of all manifestations and principles.^[8] According to P.K. Agrawala, while *māyā* is found in later day philosophies in the context of illusion, the theory of *Maya* in upanishadic philosophy has in its background the cult of the goddess *māyā*; and the acceptance of Mahesvara-Shiva as her spouse represents the inter-mingling of systems and worship forms of these two divinities.^[8]

In Samkhya and Puranas

The early works of Sankhya do not identify or directly mention the *maya* doctrine.^[10] Early Sankhya does not identify *Prakriti* as feminine.^[11] But the later *Samkhyakarika* provides a metaphor of *Prakriti* as a seductive dancer enticing all inactive Purushas (except one Ishvara, the Mahayogin, who remains free and detached) to join her in creating the world; such that the fall into the created world can only be reversed by breaking away from *Prakriti* using the spiritual discipline of Ishvara, as a model for liberation.^[11] Successful yogic liberation would leave *Prakriti* without dance partners and she returns to an undifferentiated mass.^[11]

Vācaspati Miśra's commentary on the *Samkhyakarika* attacks the *Maya* doctrine saying "It is not possible to say that the notion of the phenomenal world being real is false, for there is no evidence to contradict it".^[10]

The Sankhya dualism view of Purusha and *Prakriti* was a metaphysical one related to yogic retreat and isolation. However, some puranic writers portrayed *prakriti* as a feminine power sacralizing the human body, emotions, nature and human relations.^[11] The goddess as *prakriti* was identified with the creative *maya* of the vedanta tradition and the powerful *shakti* of tantricism.^[11] According to J.N.Tiwari:

philosophical basis of the Great Goddess should be traced to a theistic adaptation of Upanishadic Vedantism mixed with the Samkhya conception of *Prakriti*. As it is, the Goddess is imagined as the Supreme Principle in her own right, as eternally existing, as Supreme Knowledge, as the cause of the bondage and the final liberation of beings, etc.^[11]

In the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, Radha is *Prakriti* and identified with the energy of Brahman; with her being the true form of Brahman and sometimes superior to it.^[11] Spiritual qualities (*sattvagunas*) are considered means of release for *Prakriti*. The *Samkhyakarika* says "As the unknowing milk functions for the sake of the nourishment of the calf; so the *prakṛti* functions for the sake of the release of the *puruṣa*".^[11]

In Vedanta

The mystic teachings in Vedanta are centered on a fundamental truth of the universe that cannot be reduced to a concept or word for the ordinary mind to manipulate. Rather, the human experience and mind are themselves a tiny fragment of this truth. In this tradition, no mind-object can be identified as absolute truth, such that one may say, "That's it." So, to keep the mind from attaching to incomplete fragments of reality, a speaker could use this term to indicate that truth is "Not that."

In Vedanta, māyā is to be seen through, like an epiphany (darśana), in order to achieve moksha (liberation of the soul from the cycle of samsara). Ahamkāra (ego-consciousness) and karma are seen as part of the binding forces of māyā. Māyā may be understood as the phenomenal Universe of perceived duality, a lesser reality-lens superimposed on the unity of Brahman. It is said to be created by the divine application of the Līlā (creative energy/material cycle, manifested as a veil—the basis of dualism). The sanskaras of perceived duality perpetuate samsara.

Maya is often translated as "illusion", since our minds construct a subjective experience, which we are in peril of interpreting as reality. Māyā is the principal deity that manifests, perpetuates, and governs the illusion and dream of duality in the phenomenal Universe. For some mystics, this manifestation is real.^[12] Each person, each physical object, from the perspective of eternity, is like a brief, disturbed drop of water from an unbounded ocean. The goal of enlightenment is to understand this—more precisely, to experience this: to see that the distinction between the self and the Universe is a false dichotomy. The distinction between consciousness and physical matter, between mind and body (refer bodymind), is the result of an unenlightened perspective.

In Advaita Vedanta

In Advaita Vedanta philosophy, māyā is the limited, purely physical and mental reality in which our everyday consciousness has become entangled. Māyā is held to be an illusion, a veiling of the true, unitary Self—the Cosmic Spirit also known as Brahman. The concept of māyā was introduced by the ninth-century Hindu philosopher Adi Shankara.^[13] He refuses, however, to explain the relationship between Brahman and māyā.^[14]

Many philosophies and religions seek to "pierce the veil" of māyā in order to glimpse the transcendent truth from which the illusion of a physical reality springs, drawing from the idea that first came to life in the Hindu stream of Vedanta.

Māyā is a fact in that it is the appearance of phenomena. Since Brahman is the only truth, māyā is true but not the truth, the difference being that the truth is the truth forever while what is true is only true for now. Since māyā causes the material world to be seen, it is true in itself but is "untrue" in comparison to the Brahman. On the other hand, māyā is not false. It is true in itself but untrue in comparison with the absolute truth. In this sense, reality includes māyā and the Brahman. The goal of spiritual enlightenment ought to be to see Brahman and māyā and distinguish between them. Hence, māyā is described as indescribable. Māyā is avyakta and as Parameshashakti has two principal functions: one is to veil Brahman and obscure and conceal it from our consciousness; the other is to present and promulgate the material world and the veil of duality instead of Brahman. The veil of māyā may be pierced, and, with diligence and grace, may be permanently rent. Consider an illusion of a rope being mistaken for a snake in the darkness. Just as this illusion gets destroyed when true knowledge of the rope is perceived, similarly, māyā gets destroyed for a person when they perceive Brahman with transcendental knowledge. A metaphor is also given—when the reflection of Brahman falls on māyā, Brahman appears as God (the Supreme Lord). Pragmatically, where the duality of the world is regarded as true, māyā becomes the divine magical power of the Supreme Lord. māyā is the veritable fabric of duality, and she performs this role at the behest of the Supreme Lord. God is not bound by māyā, just as magicians do not believe the illusions of their own magic.

The following passage is by Sri Shankaracharya:

1. The Supreme Self (or Ultimate Reality) who is Pure Consciousness perceived himself by Selfhood (i.e. Existence with "I"-Consciousness). He became endowed with the name "I". From that arose the basis of difference.
2. He exists verily in two parts, on account of which, the two could become husband and wife. Therefore,

this space is ever filled up completely by the woman (or the feminine principle) surely.

3. And He, this Supreme Self thought (or reflected). Thence, human beings were born. Thus say the (scriptures) through the statement of sage Yajnavalkya to his wife.
4. From the experience of bliss for a long time, there arose in the Supreme Self a certain state like deep sleep. From that (state) māyā (or the illusive power of the Supreme Self) was born just as a dream arises in sleep.
5. This māyā is without the characteristics of (or different from) Reality or unreality, without beginning and dependent on the Reality that is the Supreme Self. She, who is of the form of the Three Guna (qualities or energies of Nature) brings forth the Universe with movable and immovable (objects).
6. As for māyā, it is invisible (or not experienced by the senses). How can it produce a thing that is visible (or experienced by the senses)? How is a visible piece of cloth produced here by threads of invisible nature?
7. Thus māyā is invisible (or beyond sense-perception). (But) this universe which is its effect, is visible (or perceived by the senses). This would be māyā which, on its part, becomes the producer of joy by its own destruction.
8. Like night (or darkness) māyā is extremely insurmountable (or extremely difficult to be understood). Its nature is not perceived here. Even as it is being observed carefully (or being investigated) by sages, it vanishes like lightning.
9. māyā (the illusive power) is what is obtained in Brahman (or the Ultimate Reality). Avidya (or nescience or spiritual ignorance) is said to be dependent on Jiva (the individual soul or individualised consciousness). Mind is the knot which joins consciousness and matter.
10. Space enclosed by a pot, or a jar or a hut or a wall has their several appellations (e.g., pot space, jar space etc.). Like that, Consciousness (or the Self) covered here by Avidya (or nescience) is spoken of as jiva (the individual soul).
11. Objection: How indeed could ignorance become a covering (or an obscure factor) for Brahman (or the Supreme Spirit) who is Pure Consciousness, as if the darkness arising from the night (could become a concealing factor) for the sun which is self-luminous?
12. As the sun is hidden by clouds produced by the solar rays but surely, the character of the day is not hidden by those modified dense collection of clouds, so the Self, though pure, (or undefiled) is veiled for a long time by ignorance. But its power of Consciousness in living beings, which is established in this world, is not veiled.

Bhagavad Gita verses

One should understand clearly what is "field" and what is "The Knower of this field" in order to understand Maya. For the work of Maya is nothing but to fool us, by showing the "field" or "body" as the self (us) and the "Knower of the field" or the "Soul" as unreal. While the truth is that the self (we) are the "Knower of the field" / "Soul" and the "field" / "body" is apart from us, we merely see this body day to day, as it is born and dying and reborn. (See section end for how to overcome Maya).^[15]

Spoken by Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra *Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 13, Verse 26*:

Wherever a being is born, whether unmoving or moving, know that Arjuna, as born from the union between the field and the knower of the field.

(Purusha is the knower of the field; Prakriti (nature) is the field; Shiva is another name for the knower of the field and Shakti is the field; Spirit is another name for the knower of the field and Matter (Prakriti) is the field; The Knower of the field is also called as Soul where its embodied body is the field;)

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 13, Verse 30:^[16]

Only he who sees that all activities are performed by the body (field), which is created of material nature, and sees that the Self (Knower of the field) does nothing, sees aright.

(The Self (Knower of the field) is the inactive witness.)

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 18, Verse 61:

Arjuna, God abides in the heart of all creatures, causing them to revolve according to their Karma (Desires) by His illusive power (Māyā) as though mounted on a machine.

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 7, Verse 25:

(Sri Bagawan Krishna says:) I (Knower of the field) am never manifest to the foolish and ignorant. For them I am covered by My eternal creative potency [yoga-Maya]; and that is why the deluded world knows Me not, Who am unborn and infallible.

Thus Maya is Lord Krishna's potency which he uses upon ignorant people to hide himself as ignorant people do nothing but find fault in the Lord. To overcome Maya and understand the True self and to see Lord Krishna one must have faith and devotion towards Him as stated below.

Bhagavad Gita, Ch. 11, Verse 54:

(Sri Bagawan Krishna says as below after showing His four-armed form to Arjuna:)

My dear Arjuna, only by undivided devotional service can I be understood as I am standing before you, and can thus be seen directly. Only in this way can you (not only see Me but also) enter into the mysteries of My being.

Hence one should have faith and devotion to Lord Krishna in order to understand him and his divine potency - Yogmaya.

Hindu narratives

In Hinduism, *māyā* is also seen as a form of Lakshmi, a Divine Goddess. Her most famous explication is seen in the *Devi Mahatmyam*, where she is known as *Mahāmāyā*. Because of its association with the goddess, *Mayā* is now a common girl's name in India and amongst the Indian diaspora around the world.^[17]

Essentially, *Mahāmāyā* (great *māyā*) both blinds us in delusion (*moha*) and has the power to free us from it. *Māyā*, superimposed on Brahman, the one divine ground and essence of monist Hinduism, is envisioned as one with Laxmi, *Durgā*, etc. A great modern (19th century) Hindu sage who often spoke of *māyā* as being the same as the *Shakti* principle of Hinduism was *Shri Ramakrishna*.

In the Hindu scripture *Devi Mahātmyam*, *Mahāmāyā* (Great *māyā*) is said to cover Vishnu's eyes in *Yoganidra* (divine sleep) during cycles of existence when all is resolved into one. By exhorting *Mahāmāyā* to release her illusory hold on Vishnu, Brahma is able to bring Vishnu to aid him in killing two demons, *Madhu* and *Kaitabh*, who have manifested from Vishnu's sleeping form. *Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa* often spoke of Mother *māyā* and combined deep Hindu allegory with the idea that *māyā* is a lesser reality that must be overcome so that one is able to realize his or her true Self.

Māyā, in her form as *Durga*, was called upon when the gods and goddesses were helpless against the attacks of the demon *Mahisasura*. The combined material energy of all the gods, including Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, created her. She is thus said to possess the combined material power of all the gods and goddesses. The gods gave her ornaments, weapons, and her bearer, the lion. She was unassailable. She fought a fierce battle against the demon *Mahisasura* and his huge army. She defeated the demon's army, killed the demon, and hence restored peace and order to the world. Thus She is, even now, the protector of the Universe, which is lying in her lap.

Devi Mahāmāyā is also a *Kuldevata* of the *Gowd Saraswat Brahmins* and *Daivajnas* of the western coast of India.

Buddhism

Theravada

In Theravada Buddhism, the current expression of Buddhism most closely associated with early Buddhist practice, *māyā* is the name of the mother of the Buddha. This name may have some symbolic significance given the place of *māyā* in Indian thought, but it does not seem to have led this tradition to give to the concept of *māyā* much of a philosophical role. The Pali language of Theravada speaks of distortions (*vipallasa*) rather than illusion (*māyā*).

Mahayana

Subsequently, in Mahayana Buddhism, illusion seems to play a somewhat larger role. Here, the magician's illusion exemplifies how people misunderstand themselves and their reality, when we could be free from this confusion. Under the influence of ignorance, we believe objects and persons to be independently real, existing apart from causes and conditions. We fail to perceive them as being empty of a real essence, whereas in fact they exist much like *māyā*, the magical appearance created by the magician. The magician's illusion may exist and function in the world on the basis of some props, gestures, and incantations, yet the show is illusory. The viewers participate in creating the illusion by misperceiving and drawing false conclusions. Conversely, when appearances arise and are seen as illusory, that is considered more accurate.

Altogether, there are "eight examples of illusion (the Tibetan *sgyu ma* translates *māyā* and also other Sanskrit words for illusion): magic, a dream, a bubble, a rainbow, lightning, the moon reflected in water, a mirage, and a

city of celestial musicians." [18] Understanding that what we experience is less substantial than we believe is intended to serve the purpose of liberation from ignorance, fear, and clinging and the attainment of enlightenment as a Buddha completely dedicated to the welfare of all beings.

Depending on the stage of the practitioner, the magical illusion is experienced differently. In the ordinary state, we get attached to our own mental phenomena, believing they are real, like the audience at a magic show gets attached to the illusion of a beautiful lady. At the next level, called actual relative truth, the beautiful lady appears, but the magician does not get attached. Lastly, at the ultimate level, the Buddha is not affected one way or the other by the illusion. Beyond conceptuality, the Buddha is neither attached nor non-attached. [19] This is the middle way of Buddhism, which explicitly refutes the extremes of both eternalism and nihilism.

Nāgārjuna, of the Mahāyāna Mādhyamika (i.e., "Middle Way") school, discusses *nirmita*, or illusion closely related to māyā. In this example, the illusion is a self-awareness that is, like the magical illusion, mistaken. For Nagarjuna, the self is not the organizing command center of experience, as we might think. Actually, it is just one element combined with other factors and strung together in a sequence of causally connected moments in time. As such, the self is not substantially real, but neither can it be shown to be unreal. The continuum of moments, which we mistakenly understand to be a solid, unchanging self, still performs actions and undergoes their results. "As a magician creates a magical illusion by the force of magic, and the illusion produces another illusion, in the same way the agent is a magical illusion and the action done is the illusion created by another illusion." [20] What we experience may be an illusion, but we are living inside the illusion and bear the fruits of our actions there. We undergo the experiences of the illusion. What we do affects what we experience, so it matters. [21] In this example, Nagarjuna uses the magician's illusion to show that the self is not as real as it thinks, yet, to the extent it is inside the illusion, real enough to warrant respecting the ways of the world.

For the Mahayana Buddhist, the self is māyā like a magic show and so are objects in the world. Vasubandhu's Trisvabhavanirdeśa, a Mahayana Yogacara "Mind Only" text, discusses the example of the magician who makes a piece of wood appear as an elephant. [22] The audience is looking at a piece of wood but, under the spell of magic, perceives an elephant instead. Instead of believing in the reality of the illusory elephant, we are invited to recognize that multiple factors are involved in creating that perception, including our involvement in dualistic subjectivity, causes and conditions, and the ultimate beyond duality. Recognizing how these factors combine to create what we perceive ordinarily, ultimate reality appears. Perceiving that the elephant is illusory is akin to seeing through the magical illusion, which reveals the dharmadhatu, or ground of being. [22]

Tantra

Buddhist Tantra, a further development of the Mahayana, also makes use of the magician's illusion example in yet another way. In the completion stage of Buddhist Tantra, the practitioner takes on the form of a deity in an illusory body (māyādeha), which is like the magician's illusion. It is made of wind, or prana, and is called illusory because it appears only to other yogis who have also attained the illusory body. The illusory body has the markings and signs of a Buddha. There is an impure and a pure illusory body, depending on the stage of the yogi's practice. [23]

The concept that the world is an illusion is controversial in Buddhism. The Buddha does not state that the world is an illusion, but *like* an illusion. In the Dzogchen tradition the *perceived reality* is considered literally unreal, in that objects which make-up perceived reality are known as objects within ones mind, and that, *as we conceive them*, there is no pre-determined object, or assembly of objects in isolation from experience that may be considered the "true" object, or objects. As a prominent contemporary teacher puts it: "In a real sense, all the visions that we see in our lifetime are like a big dream [...]" [24] In this context, the term *visions* denotes not only visual perceptions, but appearances perceived through all senses, including sounds, smells, tastes and

tactile sensations.

Different schools and traditions in Tibetan Buddhism give different explanations of the mechanism producing the illusion usually called "reality".^[25]

“ The real sky is (knowing) that samsara and nirvana are merely an illusory display.^[26] ”

—Mipham Rinpoche, *Quintessential Instructions of Mind*, p. 117

Even the illusory nature of apparent phenomena is itself an illusion. Ultimately, the yogi passes beyond a conception of things either existing or not existing, and beyond a conception of either samsara or nirvana. Only then is the yogi abiding in the ultimate reality.^[27]

Sikhism

In Sikhism, the world is regarded as both transitory and relatively real.^[28] God is viewed as the only reality, but within God exist both conscious souls and nonconscious objects; these created objects are also real.^[28] Natural phenomena are real but the effects they generate are unreal. māyā is as the events are real yet māyā is not as the effects are unreal. Consider the following examples. In the moonless night, a rope lying on the ground may be mistaken for a snake. We know that the rope alone is real, not the snake. However, the failure to perceive the rope gives rise to the false perception of the snake. Once the darkness is removed, the rope alone remains; the snake disappears.

Five Evils

1. Kam (Lust)
2. Krodh (Rage)
3. Lobh (Greed)
4. Moh (Attachment)
5. Ahankar (Ego)

- *Sakti adher jeverhee bhram chookaa nihchal siv ghari vaasaa.*

In the darkness of māyā, I mistook the rope for the snake, but that is over, and now I dwell in the eternal home of the Lord.

(sggs 332).

- *Raaj bhuiang prasang jaise hahi ab kashu maram janaaiaa.*

Like the story of the rope mistaken for a snake, the mystery has now been explained to me. Like the many bracelets, which I mistakenly thought were gold; now, I do not say what I said then. (sggs 658).^[29]

In some mythologies the symbol of the snake was associated with money, and māyā in modern Punjabi refers to money. However in the Guru Granth Sahib māyā refers to the "grand illusion" of materialism. From this māyā all other evils are born, but by understanding the nature of māyā a person begins to approach spirituality.

- *Janam baritha jāṭ rang māṯiā kai. ||1|| rahāo.*

You are squandering this life uselessly in the love of māyā.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib M.5 Guru Arjan Dev ANG 12

The teachings of the Sikh Gurus push the idea of sewa (selfless service) and simran (prayer, meditation, or remembering one's true death). The depths of these two concepts and the core of Sikhism comes from sangat (congregation): by joining the congregation of true saints one is saved. By contrast, most people are believed to suffer from the false consciousness of materialism, as described in the following extracts from the Guru Granth

Sahib:

- *Mā̃iā mohi visāriā jagat̃ piṭā partipāl.*

In attachment to māyā, they have forgotten the Father, the Cherisher of the World.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib M3 Guru Amar Das ANG 30

- *Ih sarīr mā̃iā kā puṭlā viḥ hãumai ḍustī pā̃ī.*

This body is the puppet of māyā. The evil of egotism is within it.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib M3 Guru Amar Das

- *Bābā mā̃iā bharam bhulā̃e.*

O Baba, māyā deceives with its illusion.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib M1 Guru Nanak Dev ANG60

- "For that which we cannot see, feel, smell, touch, or understand, we do not believe. For this, we are merely fools walking on the grounds of great potential with no comprehension of what is."

Buddhist monk quotation^[30]

See also

- Acosmism
- Avidya (Hinduism)
- Avidyā (Buddhism)
- Hindu cosmology
- Kleshas (Hinduism)
- Indrajala

Notes

[^] **a**: From a Proto-Indo-Iranian **māyā*, cognate to Avestan *māyā* with an approximate meaning of "miraculous force", of uncertain etymology, either from a root *may-* "exchange", or from a root *mā-* "measure", among other suggestions; Mayrhofer, EWAia (1986-2001), s.v.^[31]

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- (*Maya, the grand Illusion or Delusion of the Mind*, at hinduwebsite.com) (<http://www.hinduwebsite.com/maya.asp>)

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