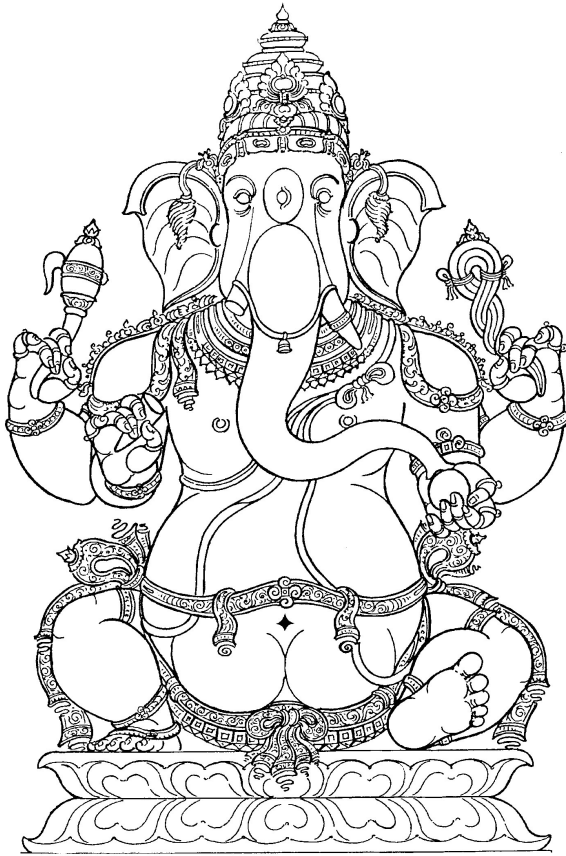


GANEŚA



Ganesha is one of the most popular and well-known of all the Hindu gods and is always worshipped first. He is the god of Wisdom and the patron of learning. Everything that we perceive in the universe must be grasped and expressed by the mind through the means of categories, therefore "category" is a fundamental principle of existence. The 'principle' by which all classifications, and the relationship of one thing to another in the universe can be understood is called *Gana-eshha* — "The-Lord-of-Categories".

Ganesha — the Lord-of-categories has two wives *Siddhi* — Success, and *Buddhi* — Intelligence sometime his second wife is said to be *Riddhi* — Prosperity.

Ganesha represents one of the basic concepts of Hindu Philosophy — the identity between the macrocosm and the microcosm. In religious terms this is the identity between the individual and the universe (humankind made in the image of God). This idea of the potential divinity of the person and the immanence of God should be

presented before the mind before beginning any undertaking. This is the reason that Ganesha is worshiped at the beginning of every enterprise. Not only this but his icon is seen at the entrance to almost every Hindu home and on every altar.

In iconography Ganesha is represented as an Elephant-headed man. The man part of Ganesha represents the manifest Principle which is subordinate to the unmanifest Principle which is represented by the elephant's head. The elephant head also represents certain qualities to which a sincere spiritual seeker is encouraged to aspire — strength, intelligence, endurance and gracefulness. The elephant is the only animal which has all it's 5 organs in the head. Thus we are taught that exerting control over the five senses is an essential pre-requisite to achieving knowledge and wisdom.

The Accoutrements

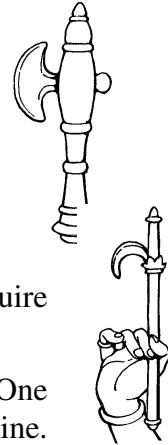
The noose [*pāśa*] — represents the three things which are the cause of our bondage to the material world which necessitate continued rebirth:

- Ignorance of our true nature [*avidya*] as eternal modes of consciousness and an erroneous identification with the material body and mind.,
- Our actions done in conformity with the false identification with the material vehicle and their inevitable reactions [*karma*].

- The habitual pattern formations which we create [*vasana*]. Many of these are useful such as performing acts of daily living, and also special skills needed for our convenience such as driving, working computers and other forms of machinery and mechanical tasks needed for earning a living. But there are more subtle and invidious pattern formation which cause suffering to ourselves and to others. These need to be uprooted — de-conditioned — in order to progress towards enlightenment.

In the hands of a free and enlightened being these three become a mere ornament!

The axe [*paraśu*] — represents non-attachment. In order to progress on the spiritual path the essential virtue to cultivate is that of non-attachment to the sense-object and their means of gratification — the noose held in the one hand needs to be cut with the axe of non-attachment in the other.



The Elephant Goad [*ankuśa*] — represents perseverance on the path of spiritual practice. The spiritual path is very arduous and difficult but if we are committed then Ganesha when propitiated will prod us by means of the Goad, and guide us to our supreme destination — union with the Divine. But that incentivization will require pain and suffering!!

The sweet [*modaka*] — represents the basic needs for food, clothing and shelter. One should never neglect one's physical well-being while one is practicing spiritual discipline. The spiritual life is to be followed in harmony with a material life — not in opposition to it.

The Mouse Vehicle [*muṣika*] — The mouse is the master of the inner part of every building, and as such it represents the *Atman* or the Self. The Self lives in the innermost recesses of the intellect, within the heart of every being. The mouse is called *mushika* in Sanskrit. It is derived the word **mush** which means to steal. The Inner Ruler (*atman*) steals everything that we enjoy, hidden from our view it enjoys all the pleasures and remains unaffected by virtue or vice. The inner ruler is the real enjoyer of everything yet the ego in ignorance thinks that it is the enjoyer! The mouse also represents the uncontrolled and negative mind that lives in the dark hidden places and destroys for the sake of destroying. Ganesha, representing wisdom can control the mind by riding on it but the mind can never be completely crushed.

One Tusk. [*eka-danta*] Ganapati acted as the scribe for the Mahabharata, on the condition that he would on no account interrupt the recitation by Vyasa who was dictating the Mahabharata for the welfare of the world. When the pen broke Ganapati broke off his own tusk in order not to interrupt the work. Thus out of great compassion for beings the Lord was prepared to mutilate himself! This is the symbolism contained in the iconographical representation.

Ganapati is always depicted as being obese because all the universe is contained in his belly, yet he himself is not contained in anyone.

THE ABSOLUTE — BRAHMAN

Hinduism teaches that there is ONE Supreme Reality— known as **Brahman** (The “Immensity”) which cannot be described by speech and is intellectually inconceivable — but it can only be realized in deep states of meditation. It is **that** from which every conceivable thing arises, by which things exist and into which everything is ultimately dissolved. This Supreme Being assumes a dual nature — Male and Female. The male aspect is known as *Purusha* which means “that-which-fills” — and the Female aspect is known as *Shakti* which translates as “Energy” or “Dynamic Force” or

Prakriti — material nature. The *Purusha* and *Shakti* are philosophically distinguishable but inseparable in their being and cosmic function. If the *Purusha* is the *word*, *Shakti* is *the meaning*; if the *Purusha* is the *flower*; *Shakti* is the *smell*. Both the subjective *Purusha* and objective *Prakriti* arise from the same “Oneness”.

*In the beginning there was Being alone,
One without a second. (Ch. U. 6;2:2)*

Although we talk of God in the masculine, any mention of ‘him’ automatically includes reference to ‘her’ as well. The Godhead is the basis, source and support of everything in the universe. Its nature consists of the three incommunicable attributes of (1) Absolute Being (*sat*), (2) Consciousness (*chit*), (3) Bliss (*ananda*).

The Trinity — Trimūrti

The Supreme Brahman is both transcendent to the creation and immanent within it. It is at once the Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer of the cosmos. Although One and inconceivable, in order to interact with the physical universe which is projection of Itself, Brahman takes on a personal aspect known as **Isvara**. *Isvara* then further manifests in a threefold form. As **Brahma**, *Isvara* creates the universe with the aid of his *Shakti Sarasvati*. *Brahma* is the personification of the attribute of Being (*sat*) transformed in “becoming”. As **Vishnu** he sustains the creation with the assistance of his *Shakti Lakshmi* — *Vishnu* is the personification of the attribute of Bliss (*ananda*) and as **Siva** he dissolves, transforms and recreates the universe with the help of **Kali** — *Siva* being the personification of the attribute of Consciousness (*cit*). These three are not separate *gods* but the supernal embodiments of the eternal cosmic dynamics of the centrifugal, centripetal and harmonising forces. This process can be likened to water vapour (*Brahman*) condensing into water (*Isvara*) and then solidifying into different shapes and forms as ice (the Trinity). Although different, all three substances are nothing but H₂O.

BRAHMĀ — Sat



Images of *Brahmā* are quite rare in India but more common in South East Asia. He is usually depicted in art in association with others and seldom on his own. *Brahmā* as the Creator God is always shown with four heads which represent the four volumes of the Sacred Scriptures — the Vedas by the power of which *Brahmā* effects the work of creation. In Hindu mythology Creation occurs by *Brahmā* projecting created beings from his own mind into the four directions.

Brahmā is the Space-Time or Revolving Principle of the Cosmos. The possibility of manifestation requires a "space" in which to appear or expand — a "space" which is the result of an equilibrium between the two forces of concentration (*Viṣṇu*) and dispersion (*Śiva*). *Brahmā* thus represents the possibility of existence resulting from a union of pairs of opposites. He is the "immense being" a personification of the great vastness — the first personal stage of existence.

In terms of consciousness and states of mind, Brahmā represents the waking state of externalised awareness (*jagrata*) — awareness and interaction with the world around us. Science deals almost exclusively with Brahmā.

The Accoutrements

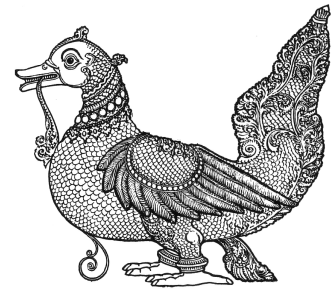
The offering spoon — held in his right upper hands symbolises the principle of sacrifice upon which the world is based. For something to be created or achieved something needs to be sacrificed whether it be resources, energy, time effort etc. All our "happiness projects" are like fires which need to be fed with the appropriate fuel. For example friendship is cultivated through offering gifts, invitations to bonding functions, supportive actions and edifying conversations, without these friendship dies out.

The receptacle of water — held in the left upper hand represents the all-pervading principle of life and consciousness. The heart of the devotee should be ready like the jar to contain and hold the life-giving waters of truth and universal wellbeing.

The rosary — held in the lower right hand indicates spiritual practice and meditation which are necessary for personal upliftment from the world of transmigration.

The book — held in the lower left hand symbolises intellectual pursuit of knowledge and the study of the Dharma.

Brahmā's vehicle is the Swan — a creature, according to Hindu mythology, which can separate milk from water. It thus represents the virtue of Discrimination — pure white symbolises purity and the ability to remain unaffected by the water in which it glides about — Detachment.



VIṢṆU — Ānanda

Viṣṇu is the name given to the cohesive or centripetal tendency of the universe — the Sattva Guna. The Viṣṇu force manifests as a flow towards the centre, towards greater cohesion, existence, reality, truth, light and sustenance. It is this centripetal tendency that holds the cosmos together and ensures its continued existence. It pervades all existence and is therefore known as "Viṣṇu". The name can be derived from the roots *vish* — *vishmati* — to spread, *vish* — *vishati* — to enter into or from *vishli* — *viveshti* — to surround = all these are expressions of pervasion.

In terms of consciousness Viṣṇu is identified with the dream-state (*svapna*) where things are conceived of as archetypes or prototypes prior to their manifestation. He is the abstract concept of all things whereas Brahmā is their realization in perishable materials.

Viṣṇu is the inner cause, the unseen power by which all things exist. Brahma is concerned with the outer material manifestation of all things, but Viṣṇu is their inner essence. Viṣṇu is the principle of duration and the power that holds the cosmos together. He is therefore the goal of all spiritual and religious paths. In fact all religion deals with Viṣṇu only. Every

religion is comprised of theology (Brahmā-vidyā) and a moral code (Dharma). Theology defines the principles which rule all existence the nature of the absolute reality and our individuality. Morals codes (Dharma)

prescribe the means for attaining the highest goal — both are encompassed by Viṣṇu.

Viṣṇu is the only high god who is regularly depicted in a reclining posture. He rests upon the great serpent of time (*ananta-sesha*) floating upon the Milk Ocean.

Ananta Sesha.

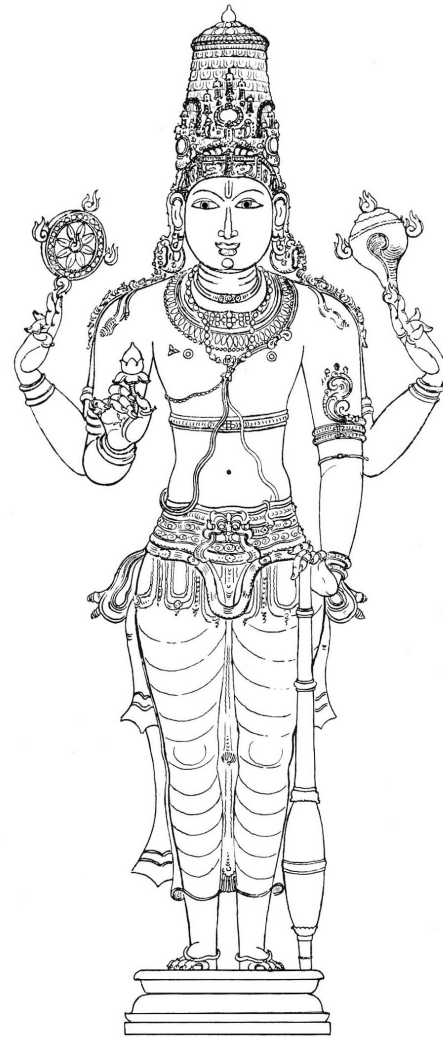
Ananta śeṣa is the name of the serpent with a thousand heads upon which Vishnu reclines. The serpent is non-different from Vishnu Himself. The word *ananta* means the endless or infinite, and *śeṣa* means the 'remnant' or 'residue'. When creation is withdrawn it cannot entirely cease to be,

there must remain a germ in subtle form of all that has been and will be so that the world can be re-projected when the time comes. It is this remainder of the universe that is embodied by *Ananta śeṣa* floating upon the limitless ocean of the causal waters and forming the couch upon which Vishnu rests.

Ocean of Milk.

This symbolizes the state of undifferentiated unity of *prakṛiti* (primordial matter) prior to creation of the universe. It stands for the pure unadulterated state when the three cosmic forces; (*rajas*) centrifugal force — expansion, (*tamas*) centripetal force — contraction and (*sattva*) centralizing or harmonizing force] exist in perfect harmony and balance.

It also represents the consciousness, in the myth dealing with the churning of the ocean of milk we have the symbol of churning the mind through devotion in order to produce the essence (butter) in the form of God Consciousness. During this process the 14 jewels are extracted. The ocean is also symbolic of the space or ether or infinity, and Vishnu is identified with the sun whose function of creation, preservation and destruction in our solar system is identical to that of the Supreme Lord in the entire universe.



The Accoutrements

The Conch (Śaṅkha)

The conch in His upper left hand represents the first manifestation of articulate language—AUM—*nada brahman*. This monosyllable contains within itself all language and meaning in a

potential state. It is the seed from which speech developed — the nutshell containing the whole of wisdom. All the forms of the universe are effects of the primeval sonic vibration. Thus the conch is the symbol of the origin of existence. Its shape is a spiral, starting at one point and evolving into ever increasing spheres. It comes from water, the first compact element. When blown it produces the sound AUM.

During war in ancient India the conch was blown to signal the commencement of the battle, it was also blown by the victorious parties to announce their victory. The god's blowing of the conch therefore indicates that he is always ready to do battle with the forces of evil and for the protection of his devotees.

The Discus (cakra)

The Discus in His upper right hand is called *sudarśana* which means 'pleasing-to-see', it is usually shown in iconography with a hexagon in the center. The six points of the two triangles represent the six seasons in a yearly time cycle, in the center nave is the seed sound (bīja) '*hrim*', which represents the changeless, motionless center, the Supreme Cause.

The Cosmic Mind has the unlimited power which creates and destroys all spheres of existence (lokas) and forms of the universe, the nature of which is to revolve. The Discus represents the "will-to-multiply". There is only one center to the wheel but it is said to have a thousand spokes.

The Lotus (Padma)

The lotus in His lower right hand represents the manifested universe, the flower that unfolds in all its glory from the formless and infinite waters of causality. It also represents purity on mind, body and speech.

The Mace (gada)

The mace held in his lower left hand is the form of strength or power, and the intellect is the highest power, by the power of mind one person can control thousands. The mace is thus the symbol of the intellect (*buddhi*) or the power of knowledge.

It is called *kaumodaki* which means *the-stupifier-of-the-mind*. The power of knowledge is the essence-of-life from which all physical and mental powers come. Nothing else can conquer time and itself become the power of time.

The mace as a symbol of sovereignty also indicates the law of Karma by which all humans are governed.

Vishnu's Vehicle.



Vishnu rides upon a creature half-human & half-eagle known as Garuda or Garutman which means "*wings-of-speech*". He is the manifestation of the triple Vedas. As the embodiment of the principle of sacrifice Viṣṇu is carried by the rhythms, (Rik) sounds (Sama) and the methodology (Yajus) which are the instruments of the ritual. Garuda is depicted as the mortal enemy of snakes — he thus represents courage. Snakes represent all those factors that obstruct the spiritual path. His wife's name is *Unnati* or "progress" also called "queen-of-knowledge"

ŚIVA — Cit

Rudra-Śiva



Rudra means the “Howler” or the “one-who-causes-weeping” and **Śiva** means “the auspicious” or “benevolent one” — as the destroyer or transformer of the trinity Siva has a dual and indeed complex character. He is the power of destruction in the universe as well as the force of regeneration which follows destruction.

Śiva is the embodiment of *Tamas*, the centrifugal inertia, the tendency towards disintegration, dispersal, annihilation, non-existence, darkness, the Void. The dispersion is the final outcome of all differentiation, all time and space. In terms of consciousness Siva is experienced in the emptiness of dreamless sleep — the state of *sushupti*. Knowledge of outward forms is obtained in the state of awareness or wakefulness (*jagrata = brahma*). Knowledge of inner principles is achieved in the state of inner reflection and contemplation, in the dream world (*svapna = vishnu*). Perception of the formless transcendental Reality is achieved only in the state of deep silence, in the emptiness of the mind. (*sushupti = Siva*). The name *Śiva* can also be

derived from the root *śin* which means “to sleep”. He is thus “the Lord of sleep”

Lord Siva is the teacher of the four great sciences which lead directly to an understanding of the higher reality of existence.

Yoga — the direct means to achieving supra-sensorial perception.

Vedanta — the theory of metaphysics or the philosophical pursuit of the Absolute.

Language — the relation of words to ideas and the expression of the Ultimate Reality

Music. — the perception of the relation of numbers to ideas and forms.

All of these can be derived from the mystery of the Maheshavara Sutras which arose from the drum of Lord Siva at the time of the cosmic dance and are the forces through which the universe was shaped.

From a purely material point of view destruction happens in 2 phases, the first is death and the second is dissolution of individuality. The first phase is the end of the body and physical existence the second is liberation from the subtle bonds which bind one to the cycle of reincarnation. These are represented by the 2 aspects of Siva — the first is “undesirable” and controlled by

Rudra, the second is “desirable” and is controlled by **Siva**. Thus lord Siva is ultimately the “death of death itself” — *Yamantaka*.

The deer and the crescent moon seen on the left side of the Lord’s crown both indicate the mind in it’s two aspects — intellect and emotion. **The moon** on Lord Siva’s crown indicates that as the Supreme Yogi he has

complete control over his mind, and as the World Teacher (*Jagat-guru*) he teaches that we too should try to control the intellect. **The leaping deer** in the hand indicates the teaching that we should also try to control the emotional mind which is as fleeting and unstable as the deer bounding through the forest at the slightest perceived disturbance. The deer is never still but constantly aware and attentive to every sound in the environment. According to Yoga Shastras (and confirmed by medical science) sound is the last sense to go when we fall unconscious

and is the first sense we regain when being aroused. Thus in the Yogic texts sound is indicative of all the other senses which follow it. The deer thus symbolises us in the material world where every sound and sense pleasure captivates our attention. We are unable to remain without sense stimulation for even a short while. In order to progress along the spiritual path it is essential for us to attempt to control and direct the emotional part of our being into constructive and universally beneficial work, while avoiding self-absorption and selfishness.

The Accoutrements

The axe represents non-attachment. In order to attain abiding peace and joy it is essential to develop non-attachment to ego, ideas, emotions, family, friends, possessions etc. It is attachment and craving which are the twin causes of sorrow in the world — making a supreme effort, the seeker of supreme joy should sever these bonds. This does not mean renouncing the world, but renouncing attachment to things. Possessing them, enjoying them, caring for them but remaining emotionally unattached is the secret of true happiness.

The rosary (japa mala) is representative of spiritual practice. In this age of Kali the recommended spiritual practice for all people is simply the chanting of the holy name. For the devotees of Lord Siva this means the chanting of the sacred mantra of five letters **om nama śivāya**. This mantra is repeated constantly and if full concentration is not possible then a rosary is used as an aid to concentration. The teaching pose is indicative that Lord Siva is the world teacher and a devotee should not only worship him but also follow the teachings of the Scriptures.

The Bull — Nandi represents virility or libido. Nandi in Sanskrit means ‘delight’ and the greatest form of delight on the material

plane is sexual. Sex is perhaps one of the greatest drives and also the hardest to control and sublimate. The bull is usually quite placid but when aroused can become a terrible force capable of destruction. In the same way if the sex-drive remains uncontrolled it is capable of great damage to oneself and one’s relationships. Therefore the bull of our libido should be tamed, mounted and guided, it should not be left to wander at will, but directed at some universally beneficent goal. These are some of the lesson that we can learn from contemplating this particular Icon.



NAṬARĀJA

The well-known bronze sculpture of *Naṭarāja* (the King of Dancer) is considered to be one of the most beautiful pieces of art produced by Indian craftsmen. The sanctum sanctorum of every Śiva temple is occupied by the *Lingam* a phallic image which symbolizes Śiva as the unmanifest Progenitor of the Universe, but every Śiva temple also has a shrine dedicated to Śiva in his form of *Naṭarāja* performing the *Ānanda tāṇḍava* — the "Dance of Bliss".

In this icon we are instructed in the five functions of the Supreme Being; creation, sustenance, transformation, revealing and concealing.

The Dance takes place within a ring of flames which symbolises the cycle of births and deaths, the cycle of universal creation and destruction — projection and withdrawal. The god dances upon the back of the "Dwarf of Ignorance" known as *Mulayaka*. It is ignorance of our true nature that binds us to cycle of continual becoming and it is wisdom/ enlightenment that releases us.

The Accoutrements

The hour-glass shaped drum (*damaru*) — held in the right upper hand symbolises the act of creation. According to Tantric teachings the act of creation takes place through sonic vibration. This primary sound is symbolised by the drum, from which all the sounds of the Sanskrit alphabet originated at the beginning of time. The universe of our empirical experience is composed of Ideation (*nama*) and Form (*rupa*). We see the universe and then participate in it through the process of naming everything. By naming something we are able to understand it and obtain a sense of control over it. So this process of creating, cognising and naming are all symbolised by the drum. The two sides of the drum represent the pairs of opposites and their merging in the centre. God and evil, male and female, day and night etc are all merely two necessary ends of the same continuum.

The flame — held in the upper left hand of Śiva represents the flame of destruction and transformation. An object when consumed by the fire is destroyed in one sense but transformed into energy and thus continues in another more subtle form.



In the same way our physical bodies and the universe are destroyed but the Self (*atman*) continues to exist in a subtle form as does the universe. Nothing is destroyed absolutely — it only undergoes changes and change is the only thing constant in our world.

The Gesture of Fearlessness (*abhaya mudra*). The left hand is held up in this gesture of dispelling fear. Our greatest fear is that of death and personal annihilation. The upheld hand is Śiva's assurance of protection and preservation. It also indicates the necessity of cultivating harmlessness (*ahimsa*) and affording the gift of fearlessness to all other beings that we encounter.

The Gesture of concealment by the right lower hand indicates drawing of the veil of Cosmic Illusion (*maya*) over all creation. There is a very subtle veil that clouds our understanding — even though we see death all around us we each think that we are

immortal. We know what is good for us but still we pursue that which is transient and unbeneficial. We cling to the ephemeral universe thinking that we can gain ultimate pleasure and satisfaction through it, but even though we fail we still go on trying — this is *Maya* or Cosmic Illusion.

And finally the left leg projecting outside of the circle of influence indicates the way of release and liberation. By surrendering to the Divine Will and making an offering of ourselves we can, through the Grace of Śiva obtain release from the cycle of births and deaths and attain eternal beatitude (*Nirvana*).

The Crest-moon in his hairs indicates the power of sublimated eros, it is also the symbol of time - days and months.

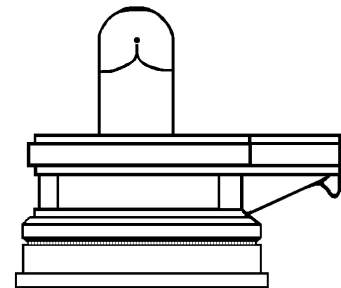
The River Ganges caught in his out spread dread-locks symbolise the intention, the ability and the means of liberating all sentient beings.

The tiger skin loincloth — The tiger is the vehicle of Śiva's consort Durga who represents primordial nature (*prakriti*) - Śiva is thus shown to be the master of Nature in all it's forms.



THE LINGAM

“The lord-of-sleep” (Śiva), is primarily worshiped through the abstract symbol of the **lingam** — the phallus which is depicted standing in a base which encircles and holds it — the **yoni** or the womb. The lingam ejaculates the seed (*bīja*) of the spatial universe into the yoni which is the matrix of all manifestation. Creation of all life-forms occurs through copulation, the mingling of the female and male seed. The most appropriate iconic images for this process of generation are the organs of generation — the *Lingam* and the *Yoni*.



There is nothing to be ashamed of in this imagery — it is purely a biological fact of life. Many modern Hindus, under the irreverent attacks of puritan Christians and Muslims have started pretending that the lingam is NOT a phallic emblem but rather an “abstract” form of the formless

Most of these “puritanical” reformers base their argument upon the Sanskrit grammar in which the term “Lingam” means sign, significator or indication. *Linga* is therefore that which differentiates

one thing from another — i.e. gender. How is a male to be differentiated from a female except by the genitals? i.e. penis and vagina.

The *Lingam* as a symbol of creation is universal and common to most ancient cultures throughout the world.

Lord Śiva is the “Transformer” for matter/energy is never destroyed, it only changes its form. Śiva is therefore both the author of disintegration and reintegration. Birth requires death, all changes entail the destruction of the previous form or state and the generation of a new one.

Lord Śiva is also known as Mahākāla — the Great Principle of Time in which all changes occur.

