

Vishnu

For other uses, see Vishnu (disambiguation).

Vishnu (Sanskrit pronunciation: [viʃnu]; Sanskrit: वृष्णु, *Viṣṇu*) is one of the most significant deities in Hinduism. He is the Supreme God Svayam Bhagavan of Vaishnavism (one of the principal denominations of Hinduism).^[1] He is also known as Narayana and 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]

In Hindu sacred texts, Vishnu is usually described as having the dark complexion of water-filled clouds and having four arms. He is depicted as a pale blue being, as are his incarnations Rama and Krishna. He holds a padma (lotus flower) in his lower left hand, the Kaumodaki gada (mace) in his lower right hand, the Panchajanya shankha (conch) in his upper left hand and the discus weapon considered to be the most powerful weapon according to Hindu Religion Sudarshana Chakra in his upper right hand.

1 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”.^[3] 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”.^[4]

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.”^[5]



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

2 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*.^[6] These both declare Vishnu as *Para Brahman* Supreme Lord who creates unlimited universes and enters each one of them as Lord of Universe.



A 13th century Cambodian statue of Vishnu



Seshashayin form of Vishnu

3 Shruti

3.1 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.

3.1.1 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.^[7] 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.^[8] In some of the extant Puranas, and Vaishnava traditions, Vishnu’s eye is considered to be situated at the infinitely distant Southern Celestial Pole.^[9]

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 Mohini, the only female avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu. then as a half-man-half-animal (Varaha the Boar-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, 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.^{[10][11]}

Vishnu's actions lowered Indra's ranking among Hindu deities and led to the ascendancy of Vishnu.^[10]

3.1.2 Rigveda



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



Lord Vishnu (Sheshnarayan) in a small pond outside Sheshnarayan Temple, Kathmandu

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 close friend of Indra. 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.^{[10][12]} 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.^[12] 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.

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 Suktam' 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.^[10]

3.1.3 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

God 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.



God Vishnu Bronze, 10th–11th century, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India



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

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.

3.2 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 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.^[10]

Sayana writes that in Aitareya Brahmana 1:1:1 the declaration *agnir vai devānām ava mo 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 prthivyām 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).^[13] 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.^[10] Mahabharata (Vana parva – CCXX) describes Vishnu as one of the forty nine fires – “And the fire in whose honour oblations of clarified butter are enjoined to be made here at the Darsa and Purnamasya sacrifices and who is known as Vishnu in this world, is (the third son of Bhanu) called Angiras, or Dhritiman.”

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.”^[14]

4 Smṛiti

4.1 Vishnu Smṛiti

The Vishnu Smṛiti, 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).^[15] 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.^[16]

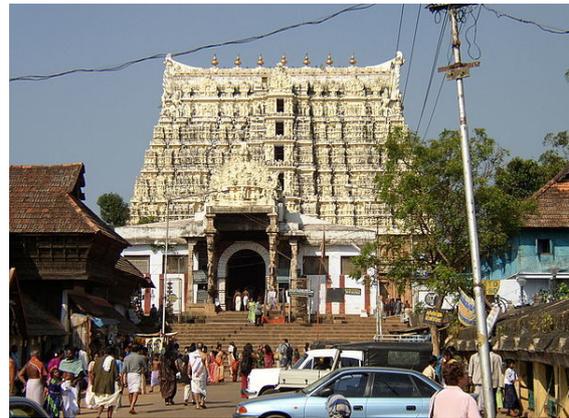
4.2 Bhagavata Purana

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 sadyate*, translated as “Learned transcendentalists who know the Absolute Truth call this non-dual substance as Brahman, Paramātma and Bhagavan.”^[17] Krishna Dvaipāyana Vyāsadeva, also called Bādarāyana is a writer of Shrimad bhagwat. He is the Lord, the bhagavān, among the philosophers, who in India assembled all the holy texts^{[18][19]}

5 Sangam literature

Main article: Thirumal

Tamil Sangam literature (300BCE to 500CE) mentions



The front-view of the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, dedicated to Vishnu. The temple dates back to before the Sangam period, and is believed to be the wealthiest place of worship in the world, with assets of gold and precious stones potentially estimated to be worth trillions of dollars.^{[20][21][22][23][24][25]}

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 mad-
halu nI vencudar oLiyu nI thingaluL aLiyu nI
anaiththu nI anaiththinut poruLu nI”

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 Vaishnavaites Acharyas in various commentaries

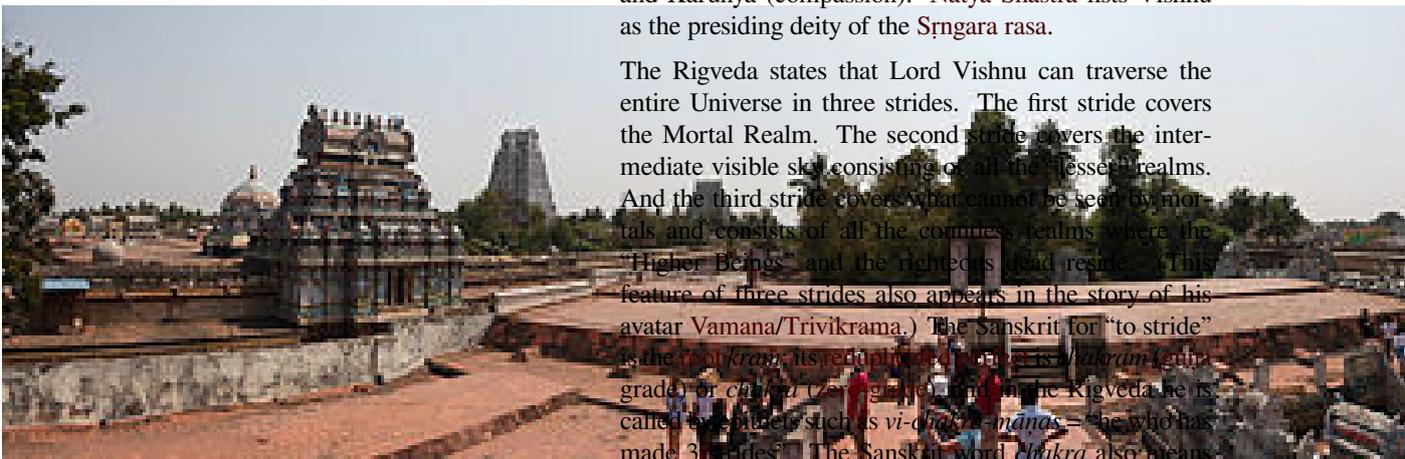
The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple and Vishnu, Lakshmi is mentioned in Tamil works of literature of the Sangam era, including the epic *Silapadikaram* (book 11, lines 35–40):

*āyiram virittelu talaiyutai aruntirar
pāyar pallip palartolu tēta viritiraik kāviri
viyaṅperu turuttit tiruvamar mārpaṅ 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



The Sri Ranganathaswamy Temple dedicated to Vishnu in Srirangam



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.^{[26][27]} The temple occupies an area of 156 acres (630,000 m²) with a perimeter of 4,116 m (13,504 ft)

making it the largest temple in India and one of the largest religious complexes in the world.^[28]

6 Theological attributes

Main article: Vaishnavism

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 maintain or challenge dharma;
- **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.^[29]

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

The Rigveda states that Lord Vishnu can traverse the entire Universe in three strides. The first stride covers the Mortal Realm. The second stride covers the intermediate visible sky consisting of all the "heavenly" realms. And the third stride covers what cannot be seen by mortals and consists of all the "cosmic" realms where the "Higher Beings" and the righteous dead reside. (This feature of three strides also appears in the story of his avatar *Vamana/Trivikrama*.) The Sanskrit for "to stride" is the *trivikram*; its reduplicated form is *trivikram* (trivikrama) or *chakra* (Chakra) and in the Rigveda he is called by epithets such as *vi-chakra-mānas* = "he who has made 3 strides". The Sanskrit word *chakra* also means "wheel". That may have suggested the idea of Vishnu carrying a chakra.

6.1 Five forms

See also Pañcaratra



The Angkor Wat Temple is the largest existing Temple in the world; it is the largest religious structure ever built anywhere in recorded history; and with 6 million to 10 million blocks of sandstone, each weighing 1.5 tons on average, it is by far the largest stone structure ever built anywhere in recorded history.^[30]



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

The Sri Vaishnavism school within Hinduism dates to around the 10th century AD and believes that Vishnu assumes five forms:

1. The Para Form.-Paravasudeva
2. The Vyuh form. Krishna, Sankarshana, Aniruddha, Pradyumna
3. The Vibhava form.
4. The Antaryami form (“dwelling within” or “Sukma Vasudeva” form).

5. The Arcavatara or image manifestation form.

7 Relations with deities

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.”^{[31][32]} These three deities have also been called “the Hindu triad”^[33] or the “Great Trinity”,^[34] all having the same meaning of three in One. They are the different forms or manifestations of One person the Supreme Being.^[35]

7.1 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. They complement each other. Within Vaishnavism, Vishnu is widely seen as Svayam Bhagavan meaning God himself.

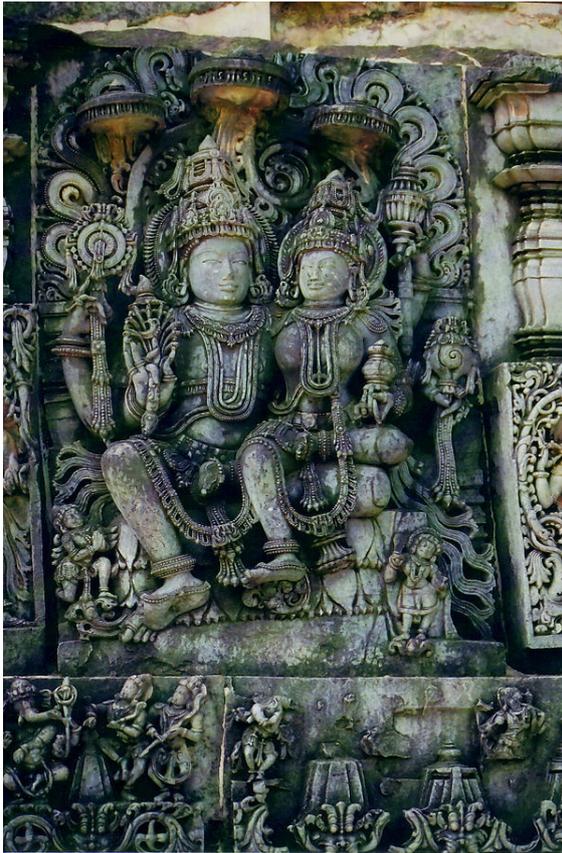
Shiva and Vishnu are both viewed as the ultimate form of god in different Hindu denominations. Several stories present one or the other deity as Supreme. In the Ramayana, Hanuman is an incarnation of Shiva who is completely dedicated to Rama, an avatar of Vishnu. In the same story Rama worships Shiva as his ishta devata at Rameswaram before attacking Lanka. Lord Shiva and Lord Vishnu are considered to be devotees of each other.^[36]

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).^[37] This dual form, which is also called Harirudra, is mentioned in the *Mahabharata*.^[38]

7.2 Lakshmi

Main article: Lakshmi

Lakshmi, the Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune, and prosperity (both material and spiritual), is the wife and active energy of Vishnu.^[39] She is also called Sri^{[40][41]} or *Thirumagal* because she is endowed with six auspicious and divine strength even to Vishnu. When Vishnu incarnated on the Earth as the avatars Rama and Krishna, Lakshmi incarnated as his respective consorts: Sita (Rama’s wife) and Rukmini (Krishna’s wife).^[42]



Vishnu with Lakshmi (Lakshmi-Narayana) at Halebidu.

7.3 Garuda

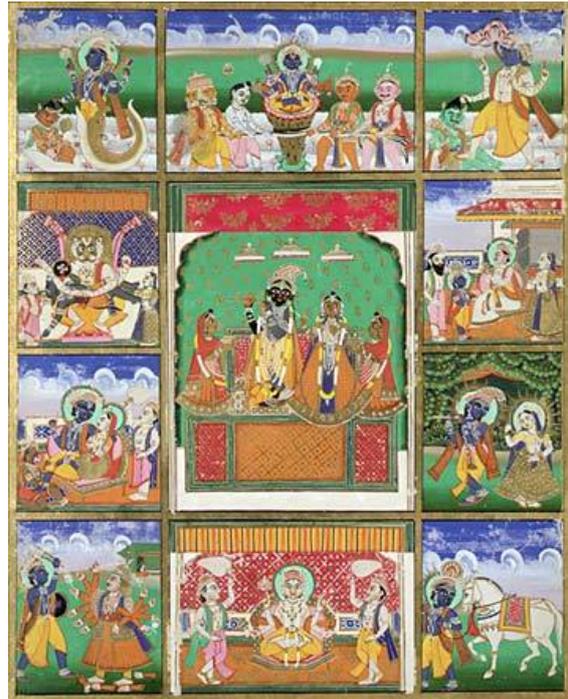
Vishnu's mount (*Vahana*) is Garuda, the eagle. Vishnu is commonly depicted as riding on his shoulders. Garuda is also considered as Vedas on which the Lord Vishnu travels. Garuda is a sacred bird in Vaishnavism. In the Garuda Purana, Garuda carries Lord Vishnu to save the Elephant Gajendra.

8 Avatars

Main article: Avatar

See also: Dashavatara

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.^[43] 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



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

famous of whom are Rama and Krishna.^[44]

The Puranabharati, an ancient text, describes these as the dashavatara, or the ten avatars of Vishnu. Ten avatars (*dashavatara*) of Vishnu are the most prominent:^[45]

Among the ten, 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,^[46] to vanquish those negative forces of evil that threaten dharma, and also to display His divine nature in front of all souls.

Another 24 avatars are given in Chapter 3, Canto 1 of the Bhagavata Purana: Adi Purush, Four Kumaras (Chatur-Sana), Varaha, Narada, Nara Narayana, Kapila, Dattatreya, Yajna, Rishabha, Prithu, Matysa, Kurma, Dhanvanthari, Mohini, Narasimha, Vamana, Parashurama, Vyasa, Rama, Balarama, Krsna, Buddha, Kalki; although it states that "the incarnations of the Lord are innumerable, like rivulets flowing from inexhaustible sources of water".

Other Vishnu Avatars: Hayagriva,

9 Beyond Hinduism

9.1 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 Lord's 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.^[47]

9.2 Buddhism



Uthpalawarna Vishnu Devalaya in Devinuwara, Matara, Sri Lanka

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 postulate 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.^[48] 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.^[49]

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.^[50] 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 the 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.^[51]

9.3 Others

Similarities between Vishnu and Ancient Egyptian God Horus have been noted by James Freeman Clarke,^[52] Richard Leviton,^[53] James Cowles Prichard,^[54] and others.

During an excavation in an abandoned village of Russia in the Volga region, archaeologist Alexander Kozhevnikov excavated an ancient idol of Vishnu. The idol dates from between the 7th and 10th centuries. In the interview Kozhevnikov, 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."^[55]

10 Thousand names of Vishnu

Main article: Vishnu sahasranama

Vishnu's many names and followers are collected in the *Vishnusahasranama* ("Vishnu's thousand names"), one well-known version of which is found in the *Mahabharata*. The character *Bhishma* recites the names before Krishna on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*, praising Vishnu as the supreme god. These *sahasranama* are regarded as the essence of all *Vedas* by followers of *Vaishnavism*, who believe sincere chanting of *Vishnusahasranama* results in spiritual well-being and greater awareness of God.

11 In popular culture

4034 Vishnu is an asteroid discovered by Eleanor F. Helin.^[56]

Vishnu rocks are a type of volcanic sediment found in the *Grand Canyon*, Arizona, USA. Consequently, mass formations are known as Vishnu's temples.^[57]

12 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
- Amaterasu
- Murali gana lola is a *bhajan* celebrating the God Vishnu's two incarnations Rama and Krishna

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15 External links

- Vishnu, the god of Preservation, by Dr. C.P.Ramaswami Aiyar
- BBC Religion & Ethics – Who is Vishnu (bbc.co.uk)

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