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HINDUISM H231

Metal Shrine With Bell



Central to Hindu worship is the image, or icon, which can be worshipped either at home or in the temple. Worship involves saying prayers and making offerings to the gods, such as water, fruit, flowers and incense. The majority of Hindus have shrines at home, which feature statues or pictures of the deity, a shrine can be anything: a room, a small altar or simply pictures or statues of the deity. This metal platform would be used to place an image of the god or goddess on. The bell would be rung to notify the god of the presence of the worshipper.

Vishnu

Vishnu is a Hindu god. Although there appear to be many Hindu gods and goddesses, Hindus recognise one God, Brahman, the eternal origin who is the cause and foundation of all existence. The gods of the Hindu faith represent different expressions of Brahman. The god Vishnu preserves and protects the universe. When the forces of good and evil in the world become imbalanced, Vishnu appears on earth through his avatars (incarnations) to save humankind. His incarnations have included Rama, Krishna, who destroyed the wicked and established a new order, Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, and Kalki. Vishnu is often shown in human form, with four arms. In one hand he holds a conch (shell), which symbolises creativity. The sound that comes from blowing this conch is the original sound of creation. In the opposite hand he holds a discus (chakra), a reminder of the wheel of time. In his lower left hand he holds a mace, which represents individual existence and symbolises the original force from which all mental and physical strength is derived. The fourth hand holds a lotus flower (or Padma) this symbolises the power from which the universe emerges. Vishnu is also shown wearing a crown, which symbolises his divine, supreme authority.



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Radha and Krishna



This is an image of the divine couple, Radha and Krishna. Krishna is one of the most popular deities throughout India. Krishna is considered the eighth avatar, or incarnation, of the god Vishnu. According to legend Krishna was not only divine, but heroic as well. Krishna is believed to have defeated numerous dragons and monsters, and eventually, as predicted, killed his half-uncle, the tyrannical king Kamsa. In his youth Krishna was said to have been a cowherder, who played his flute and charmed all the cow girls. His favorite cow girl was Radha and she was madly in love with him. They are often depicted together. Radhas devotion to Krishna is said to symbolise the human desire to unite with god. There are many different explanations offered as to why Krishna is shown as being blue. Many think it is because the colour blue is associated by hindus with the 'infinite', like the blue sky.

Image Of Shiva Nataraja

Shiva the Hindu god of destruction is also known as Nataraja, the Lord of Dancers. In Sanskrit (an ancient language still used in Hindu religion) Nata means dance and raja means Lord. According to Hindu philosophy it is Shiva's dance that keeps the universe alive. Here, Shiva is depicted with his long flowing hair spread out. His hair represents the Himalayan foothills supporting the river Ganges as it falls from heaven. He has four hands. The two upper hands hold the balance between creation and destruction. The fire in his left hand represents destruction. His lower left hand points towards the raised left foot, which signifies freedom and salvation. The hand also looks like the trunk of Ganesha, the obstacle remover, a symbol of strength. The cobra, encircling one of his hands, symbolises his solitary life of meditation in the forest and also represents men's power. His right foot is on the back of the dwarf Apasmara, who symbolises ignorance in men. Shiva is shown in the middle of a flaming circle, which represents the universe. He is frequently depicted with the third eye of knowledge on his forehead.



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Rama



This statue is of the god Rama. Rama, an earthly form of the god Vishnu, is the hero of the epic *The Ramayan*. He was a prince from the ancient north Indian kingdom of Ayodhya, but was exiled from his kingdom due to his jealous stepmother, who wanted her son to become king. Rama went to live in the forest, accompanied by his wife, Sita and his brother Lakshman and was involved in a series of adventures and challenges before returning home. To Hindus Rama represents many important virtues. He is an example of the ideal son, ideal husband and becomes the ideal king. Rama is usually shown holding a bow and arrow, indicating his readiness to destroy evils. He is depicted in princely costumes with a 'tilak' or mark on the forehead, and usually has a dark, almost bluish complexion, which shows his affinity with the gods Vishnu and Krishna.

Hanuman



This is a brass image of Hanuman. Hanuman is a monkey god, who features alongside Rama in *The Ramayan*. In this, he is a noble hero who assists Rama in defeating the evil king Ravana, who had abducted Rama's wife Sita. Hanuman represents an ideal follower, one who is totally devoted to serving the god Rama. He is seen by Hindus to be a provider of courage, hope, knowledge, intellect and devotion. He is pictured as a robust monkey holding a mace (gada).

Ganesha



Ganesha, the elephant headed god, is the son of Parvati, the wife of Shiva, the destroyer. He is celebrated as the Remover of Obstacles, the god of domestic harmony and of success. He is the most beloved and revered of all the Hindu gods, and is always invoked first in any Hindu ceremony or festival. In Hindu mythology, there are differing accounts of how Ganesha acquired the head of an elephant. In each of them, however, he is said to have come between Shiva and Parvati in some way and was rashly beheaded by his father who promptly replaced his head with that of an elephant's.

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Mala
Some Hindus use a mala when they are praying, to help them repeat the name of a God. It is thought that reciting the name of a god, or the syllable 'Om', helps the person to connect with the spiritual world. A mala is held in the hand and rotated, one bead at a time with each recitation. A Hindu mala has one hundred and eight beads or knots.



Puja Set
Puja is both the act of worship and the altar or space for the images to be worshipped. Every object associated with the ritual of Puja or worship is symbolically significant. These items are some of those most typically used:



Bell
A Bell may be rung at the start of puja to awaken the God and make it aware of the worshipper's presence. It is also used to block out other sounds coming from outside the shrine room.



Water Container
The first part of the puja is a bathing of the statues. This symbolises love and devotion.



Incense Holder
Incense may be burnt during puja- the sweet scent goes everywhere to show that God is everywhere.



Aarti Lamp
This is an aarti lamp. The bowl would be filled with oil and a wick placed in it. The Aarti is used at the end of the worship. The lamp is passed among all the people who are praying.



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Spoon
The spoon is used for food or powders.



Two-pan Holder
These may contain haldi (turmeric powder), kum kum powder, or water and tulsi leaves. The powders are applied to the statues.



Metal Box
This may contain sandalwood paste, which is applied to the statues. In addition to these items there will usually be some food and fresh flowers on the thali (puja tray) as an offering. An Aarti ceremony may also be carried out to welcome the deity, when lamps are waved gently in front of the image.



Diwali Lamp
During the festival of Diwali, small lamps, known as Diva lamps are lit. Traditionally these lamps are earthenware bowls filled with oil or butter, called ghee, with cotton wicks. The lamps symbolise the triumph of good over bad, light over darkness.



Ganges Water
The Ganges (Ganga in Hindi) is the most important Hindu sacred river. Most Hindus would like to bathe in the Ganges at least once in their lifetime. In old age Hindus try to set out for the city of Banaras so that they can die near the Ganges, be cremated there and have their ashes scattered in the sacred waters. This copper container holds Ganges water. At home a drop can be added to your own water for bathing. A drop of Ganges water would be the last thing given to a dying person if they could not die by the Ganges.



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Indian Costume Doll

This doll is supposed to represent a peasant lady from rural Rajasthan. The bundle on her head indicates that she is a field worker, although the beautifully patterned sari she wears is unlikely to be the regular everyday wear of real field labourers. On her head is a bindi indicating that she is a married Hindu woman. Dolls like these are popular with collectors as they depict the people of India in various traditional costumes from different regions.

