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HINDUISM H231/A

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 worshippers presence.

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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Lakshmi



Lakshmi is the consort of Vishnu who has appeared as the wife of each of Vishnu's incarnations: including Sita, wife of Prince Rama, and Rukmini, wife of Krishna. She is the goddess of wealth and good fortune who is offered special worship during the Diwali festival. Lakshmi is the household goddess of most Hindu families, and a favourite of women. Although she is worshipped daily, the festive month of October is Lakshmi's special month, a special worship is also offered to Lakshmi on the auspicious Diwali night. Lakshmi is depicted as a beautiful woman of golden complexion, with four hands, which hold lotus buds, which stand for beauty, purity and fertility. Her four hands represent the four ends of human life: dharma or righteousness, kama or desires, artha or wealth, and moksha or liberation from the cycle of birth and death. She is also always shown wearing gold embroidered red clothes. Red symbolises activity and the golden lining indicates prosperity.

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.

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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 Ganesh 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.

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.

Om Sign



The Om (or Aum) sign is one of the main symbols of Hinduism. Many religions indicate that creation began with sound. For the Hindus & Buddhists, Om is the original sound, the first breath of creation, the vibration that ensures existence. The Om sign signifies God, Creation, & the One-ness of all creation.

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Bindis



One of the most recognisable symbols in Hinduism is the bindi, a coloured dot on the forehead. Bindi is derived from the Sanskrit word bindu, which means 'drop'. A traditional bindi is red or maroon in colour. Usually it is made by applying a pinch of vermilion powder skilfully to make the perfect red dot. Usually bindis are worn on the forehead of married Hindu women - it symbolises female energy and is believed to protect women and their husbands. More recently, however, it has become primarily a decorative accessory and is worn by unmarried girls and non-Hindu women. It is also no longer restricted in colour or shape, and self-adhesive bindis (like these) made from felt in various designs and colours are common.

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:

Incense Holder



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

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.

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.

Water Container



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

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Spoon
The spoon is used for food or powders.

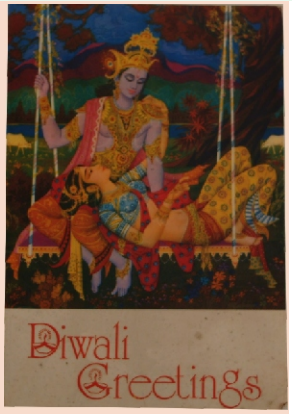


Two-pan Holder
These may contain haldi (turmeric powder), kum kum powder, or water and tulsi leaves. The powders are applied to the statues.



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 Card


Diwali festival is a 5 day Hindu festival in India which occurs on the fifteenth day of Kartika. The festival, which marks the beginning of the Hindu New Year, celebrates the victory of good over evil, light over darkness, and knowledge over ignorance, although the actual legends that go with the festival vary in different parts of India. Diwali when translated means 'rows of lighted lamps' and the occasion is also referred to as the Festival of Lights. During Diwali, Indian homes are cleaned and windows are opened to welcome Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth. Lamps, lights and candles are lit as a greeting to Goddess Lakshmi. Gifts are exchanged, sweets given out and festive meals prepared during Diwali. This card has a picture of Rama and Sita on the front. Some Hindus link the celebrations of Diwali to the homecoming of Rama and Sita to their kingdom after fourteen years of exile.

Diwali Lamp and Packet of Wicks
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.



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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.

Wedding Invitation



A Hindu wedding is a religious ceremony and one of the most important of the sixteen Hindu sanskars or sacraments. It is seen, not only as the bond between two people, but also the bond between two families. The ceremony lasts approximately 1 ½ hours minimum, but the preparations and celebrations begin weeks before the actual ceremony and continue afterwards. The Hindu service is performed by a male Brahmin priest in accordance with the holy verses (mantras) from the Vedas, the Hindu holy book. The ceremony takes place in a venue chosen by the bride's family. This is normally a town hall or community hall, or a hotel, depending on the budget of the bride's family. There are then blessings in the temple after the service. The Hindu wedding ceremony is not recognised by British law. It is therefore also necessary to marry in a civil registry office and follow this with a Hindu ceremony. Red is a popular colour for wedding invitations. In the Hindu religion red is of the utmost significance and the colour most frequently associated with occasions like weddings, births and festivals. Traditionally a Hindu bride wears a red or red and white sari on her wedding day.

Indian Costume Doll



This doll is supposed to represent a dancer from rural Rajasthan. In her hands she holds a drum. 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.