

Twelve Main Deities

The following are twelve of the main Hindu deities (plus six others, possibly less important to contemporary Hindus), showing their inter-relationships. Knowing these twelve deities will significantly help teachers in exploring the topic of God within Hinduism.

1. Brahma – the Creator	}	the Trimurti
2. Vishnu – the Preserver		
3. Shiva – the Destroyer		
4. Sarasvati – Goddess of Learning, wife of Brahma	}	wives of Trimurti
5. Lakshmi – Goddess of Fortune, wife of Vishnu,		
6. Shakti – Mother Nature, wife of Shiva		
7. Rama – form or <i>avatar</i> of Vishnu; his wife is Sita	}	important deities related to Trimurti
8. Krishna – form or <i>avatar</i> of Vishnu; girlfriend is Radha		
9. Hanuman – servant of Rama and Sita		
10. Ganesh – remover of obstacles; son of Shiva & Shakti		
11. Skanda – god of war; son of Shiva and Shakti		
12. Surya – sun god; a form of Narayan (Vishnu)		
Indra – rain god and king of heaven	}	gods with specific roles in universe
Chandra – moon god		
Agni – fire god		
Vayu – wind god		
Varuna – god of the waters		
Yama – god of death and justice		

Notes:

1. Brahma, though one of the Trimurti, is rarely worshipped.
2. The three main focuses of worship are:
 - Vishnu: worshipped by Vaishnavas
 - Shiva: worshipped by Shaivas
 - Shakti: worshipped by Shaktas (who often also worship Sarasvati and Lakshmi)
3. Parvati, Durga and Kali are all forms of Shakti
4. Skanda is also known as Murugan, Karttikeya and Subramaniam
5. Tips when teaching: we recommend that the main deities at primary level, in approximate order, are:
 - Rama (+ Sita)
 - Hanuman
 - Krishna (+ Radha)
 - Ganesh
 - Lakshmi
 - Shiva and Parvati (Shakti)
6. Not all Hindu groups have the same opinions about the above deities and their respective positions. For example, member of ISKCON consider Krishna to be the source of Vishnu and his avatars (rather than vice-versa); the largest Swaminarayan group, the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha, considers Lord Swaminarayan to be God himself; and some Hindus, believing in an impersonal Supreme, will consider all deities equal, or even imaginary.