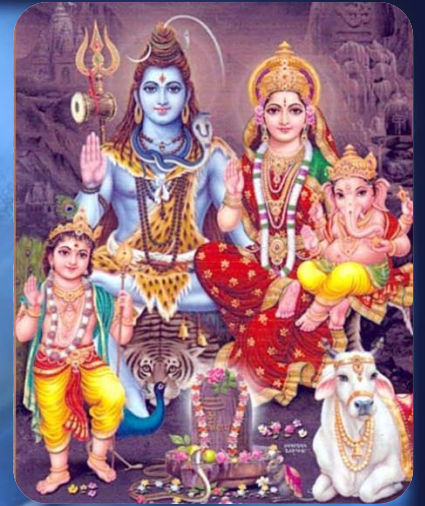


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Misconceptions regarding Shiva Lingam

lord shiva



Elephant and blind men

- There is an old story about few blind men describing an elephant based on their perceptions
- Few blind men were asked to describe what an elephant looked like by feeling different parts of the elephant's body. The blind man who feels a leg says the elephant is like a pillar; the one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope; the one who feels the trunk says the elephant is like a tree branch; the one who feels the ear says the elephant is like a hand fan; the one who feels the belly says the elephant is like a wall; and the one who feels the tusk says the elephant is like a solid pipe
- Message: While one's subjective experience can be true, but such an experience is inherently limited by its failure to account for other truths or the totality of truth

Misconceptions regarding Shiva lingam

- Just like the blind men, people have also described Shiva lingam (also referred as Shiv Ling / Shiva Linga) based on their perceptions and level of understanding
- Shiva Lingam has been graphically branded as a 'male reproductive organ / phallus', especially during the 19th century
- It is also described as a 'union of lingam and yoni (the female reproductive organ)'
- Unfortunately, some narrators & writers have gone very far and tried to reduce the representations of God to sexual symbols
- Such descriptions do not help in understanding the spiritual concepts, instead they get us further caught in our illusions based on biological and social impulses as the primary factors of life

Scholarly arguments

- Several scholars have disputed the sexual meaning of lingam, opining that this kind of 'sexual reductionism' misses the deeper message / truth of spirituality altogether
- Several spiritual leaders opine that the description of Shiva lingam as phallus is a big mistake
- Swami Vivekananda argued at the Paris Congress of the History of Religions that Shiva Lingam had its origin in the idea of the ***Yupa-Stambha*** or ***Skambha*** - the sacrificial post, idealized in Vedic ritual as the symbol of eternal **Brahman**
- This was in response to a paper read by Gustav Oppert, a German orientalist, who traced the origin of the *Shaligrama Shila* and Shiva Lingam to phallicism

Scholarly arguments

- According to Vivekananda, the explanation of the *Shaligrama Shila* as yoni / a phallic emblem was an imaginary invention
- Vivekananda argued that the explanation of Shiva Lingam as a phallic emblem was brought forward by the most thoughtless, and was forthcoming in India in her most degraded times
- Vedic scholars also argue that too much description based on illusions, should not be made on the usual shape of the Lingam
- They say that Shiva Lingam is merely an abstract symbol of God, which is consonant with philosophies that God may be conceptualized and worshipped in any convenient form
- **Shiva Lingam** also **represents** the formless (Nirākar & Nirguna) **Brahman** and the formless Supreme Soul (**Paramātma**)

Tradition of passing the knowledge

- In Hinduism (a misnomer for 'Sanātana Dharma' meaning 'eternal righteousness'), the Knowledge (Spiritual and material) is given by the Guru to his/her disciples who in turn pass the knowledge to the next generation - also referred as 'Guru-Sishya parampara' (teacher to disciple tradition)
- In India, this tradition has been in practice since the ancient times (Krita / Satya yuga), which along with spirituality, has also been followed in Ayurveda, different forms of Yoga and other professions
- However, this system / tradition has been damaged due to several factors, but especially due to wars. During the past 2000 years, India has suffered many invasions. Along with the loss of wealth, a lot of traditions have been severely damaged

Tradition of passing the knowledge

- Fortunately, the real treasure - Scriptures which include Vedas, Upanishads, Itihasas (epics), Bhagavad Gita, Brahma Sutras,.. have been preserved as much as possible
- Moreover, several great Spiritual masters / Gurus and saints (such as Shankaracharya, Ramanujacharya, Madhavacharya, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda,...) have dedicated and sacrificed their lives to revive the culture / traditions, Dharma and spread the spiritual knowledge among the masses
- In the recent years, the spiritual information has been reproduced in print, audio/video and digital formats (thanks to the tireless efforts of few organizations and noble people)

Description of God

- Scriptures (Vedas, Upanishads) clearly state that there is only **one GOD** and most importantly, GOD has a '**FORM**' and is also '**FORMLESS**' at the same time
- This description, although confusing, is similar to the '**dual nature of light**' as described in Physics. **Light has both particle (form) and wave (formless) nature simultaneously**
- The **formless** (nirguna and nirākār) or unmanifested state of God can be realized or experienced as
- **Brahman / Parabrahmam**: the sub-atomic 'God' particles present in matter / every atom and the light / energy pervading the entire universe (Brahman should not be confused with 'Brahma' - the manifestation of God as 'creator')
- **Paramātmā / Supreme Soul or Spirit**: Supreme consciousness present in every living being (not just humans)

Manifestations of God

- Scriptures unequivocally state that the manifestations of God (with a 'form') are 'infinite'. However, the principal or popular forms include
 - Saraswati - Brahma (for creation)
 - Lakshmi - Vishnu (for preservation / sustenance)
 - Parvathi - Shiva (for dissolution)
- Avatars (incarnations) of Lord Vishnu
 - Matsya*, Kurma, Varāha, **Narasimha**, Vāmana, Parashurāma, **Rāma**, **Krishna**, **Buddha**, Kalki
- Ganesha, Kartikeya, Hanuman, Ayyappa, Surya, Shani...
- Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, Itihasas, Chapters 10 and 11 of Bhagavad Gita describe few more

*Interestingly, there are similarities between the stories of **Matsya avatar** and **Noah's Ark**

Description of God - Gita verses

Brahman

मया ततमिदं सर्वं जगदव्यक्तमूर्तिना ।
मत्स्थानि सर्वभूतानि न चाहं तेष्ववस्थितः ॥ Gita Ch 9 ver 4

This entire **universe is pervaded / permeated** by Me, through My **unmanifest** aspect / divinity (formless **Brahman**). All living and non-living beings reside / exist in Me, but I am not established in them

- The above verse could be understood by considering the following analogy. Fishes and other aquatic life-forms live in water, although their bodies contain some water, but the entire water of the river/ocean is not present in the fishes or other inhabitants
- Similarly, God pervades the entire universe (omnipresent) as formless Brahman; He is also the source of the universe, sustains it and finally dissolves it. The existence of all living and non-living beings is dependent on God (but He is not dependent on anyone / anything)
- Hence, God is neither an entity residing just in heaven, nor a part / component of the universe, nor confined only to the living beings

Description of God - Gita verses

Brahman: another description of the qualities / attributes

कविं पुराणमनुशासितारमणोरणीयांसमनुस्मरेद्यः ।
सर्वस्य धातारमचिन्त्यरूपमादित्यवर्णं तमसः परस्तात् ॥ Gita Ch 8 ver 9

One who meditates on the Supreme God, who is omniscient (knows everything), primordial / eternal, controller / ruler (of the universe), **smaller than the atom (constitutes the basic sub-atomic particles), yet sustainer of everything**, with a form beyond human comprehension / imagination, **radiant like the Sun**, and far beyond the darkness of ignorance (attains Him, refer verse 8.10).

For more description on the **formless** (nirguna, nirākar) **Brahman**, refer Gita verses 3.15; 4.24; 6.29-30; 7.7; 8.3; 8.20-22; 9.6; 9.16; 10.42; 12.3; 13.12-15/13-16; 13.30/31; 14.3-4; 14.27; 17.23; 18.46

The number before the decimal refers to the chapter and the number after decimal refers to the verse/s. The first verse (Arjuna's query) in the 13th chapter is not counted in several versions of Gita. Hence, two numbers have been provided for each verse of 13th chapter

Description of God - Gita verses

Paramātmā

समं सर्वेषु भूतेषु तिष्ठन्तं परमेश्वरम् ।
विनश्यत्स्वविनश्यन्तं यः पश्यति स पश्यति ॥ Gita Ch 13 ver 27/28

One who sees the Supreme Lord (as Paramātmā / Supreme Soul) seated / situated alike in all living beings and as the imperishable within the perishable bodies, that person truly sees (perceives the absolute truth). Also refer Gita verses 6.7; 6.29; 6.31; 8.4; 9.18; 10.11; 13.15-17/16-18; 13.28/29; 13.31/32; 15.15; 15.17-18; 18.61

Infinite forms of God

हन्त ते कथयिष्यामि दिव्या ह्यात्मविभूतयः ।
प्राधान्यतः कुरुश्रेष्ठ नास्त्यन्तो विस्तरस्य मे ॥ Gita Ch 10 ver 19

All right, I will certainly tell you about My divine manifestations / forms, O best of the Kurus (Arjuna)! but only the prominent ones, as there is no end to the vastness of My manifestations. Also refer 9.15; 10.40

Worshipping God

- One can worship God as the formless Brahman, Paramātmā (Supreme Soul) or in any other beloved form
- However, it is explicitly stated in Bhagavad Gita that the **spiritual journey of a devotee engaged in the worship of formless Brahman / Paramātmā is difficult and time consuming**

क्लेशोऽधिकतरस्तेषामव्यक्तासक्तचेतसाम् ।
अव्यक्ता हि गतिर्दुःखं देहवद्भिरवाप्यते ॥

Gita Ch 12 ver 5

Difficulties / obstacles are greater for those whose minds are attached to (interested in) the unmanifested aspect of God (formless Brahman / Paramātmā). Indeed, the path for attaining God in the formless state is painful for the embodied / living beings (path is difficult to understand or follow resulting in disappointment / sorrow)

- It is much more difficult to focus on God in the unmanifested state than a beloved form of God, because **human beings need to perceive via the senses (in the beginning of spiritual journey)**

Worshipping God

- Worshipping God in a **beloved humanly form** is always better and has several advantages, especially during the early stages of spiritual journey. Generally, the various forms of God are depicted using
 - Paper, cloth (as paintings)
 - Metal, stone, wood, clay, sand (as sculptures)
- Fortunately, India is extremely rich in terms of paintings and sculptures which have been beautifully prepared by artists imagining / visualizing the Lord in their mind
- These depictions help the devotees to focus easily. We **can relate to God, as our parents (Parvathi-Shiva, Sita-Rama) or as a child (beloved Sri Krishna, Radha,..) enabling us to express our love & affection** and worship with pure devotion

Worshipping God in ancient times

- Among the infinite manifestations of God, the forms of Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva are extremely popular since ancient times
- In the present day, several pictures and sculptures of the various manifestations of God are easily available
- However, hundreds and thousands of years ago, it was not the case. There were no photos / prints! The only possibility is to have a painting or most commonly a sculpture made of stone, metal, wood or clay
- But not every person is an artist to prepare a beautiful painting or a sculpture of God
- Moreover, most of the sculptures and paintings were confined to temples and palaces as only kings and rich people could afford to hire great artists and build temples

Worshipping God in ancient times

- How about the masses - the common people? How did they worship God at their homes and villages without temples?
- They should have had some kind of simple, alternate ways to represent God at their homes & villages. It is quite possible that the practice of worshipping natural elements was one of the alternatives. Scriptures also suggest some of the alternate methods, such as worshipping
 - **SUN** whose radiance represents Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva
 - **Earth** represented as Bhu devi, one of the manifestations of Lakshmi
 - Rivers (Ganga, Saraswati,..), **Ashwattha (peepal)** tree, **Tulasi**, **Cow**,....
- Similarly, Shiva Lingam also appears to be one of the simplest alternatives / representations which could have been developed by the common, poor people over a period of time, to be placed at their homes & villages for worship

Depiction of Lord Vishnu



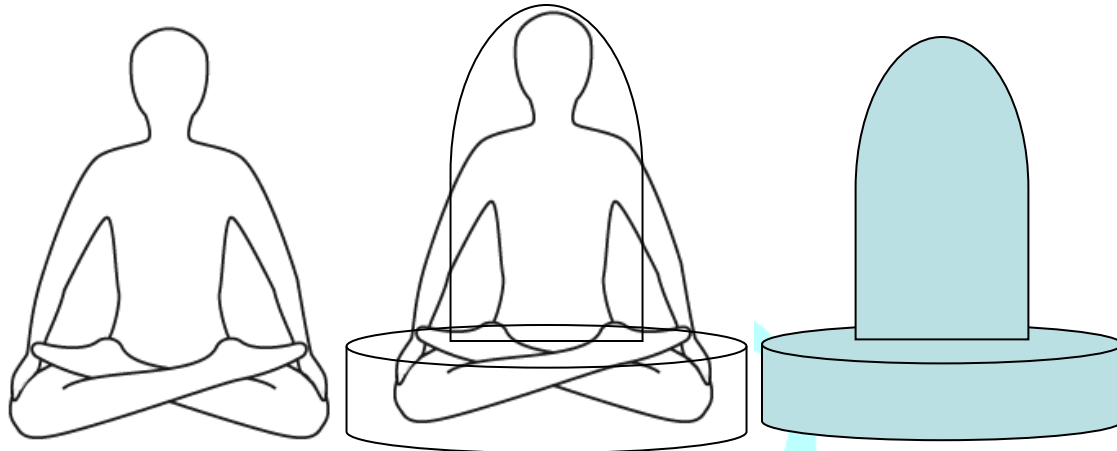
- Scriptures mention that Lord Vishnu resides in Vaikunta, lying in the 'Anantha Shayanam' posture - 'the eternal yogic sleep', on the serpent Adishesha which is floating on the milk ocean

Depiction of Lord Shiva



- Similarly, scriptures also mention that Lord Shiva resides in Kailash and is in deep meditation (in Padmāsana) mostly. Occasionally, the Lord performs the divine 'tāndava' dance

Simplified representation of Lord Shiva



- If we notice the shape of Shiva lingam, it appears to be a simplified representation / abstract form of Lord Shiva in meditation posture (the central pillar representing His head and trunk while the circular base representing His folded legs)
- Over a period of time, this simple form of Lord Shiva could have gained popularity and Shiva Lingas were installed at temples also

Shiva Lingam

- Scriptures do NOT oppose such a simplified representation, as God is omnipresent and could be invoked / visualized in any form for the sake of worship
- Moreover, the word 'ling / linga / lingam' in Sanskrit means 'sign or symbol' and NOT a body part
- Shiva Lingam can be made in few minutes using clay or sand. It is also relatively easier to make Shiva Lingam using stone or metal
- In Ramayana, Lord Rama makes a Shiva Lingam using sand at Rameshwaram
- A naturally formed Shiva Lingam referred as 'Swayambhu lingam' is also extremely popular, e.g. Ice Shiva Lingam at Amarnath formed due to freezing of water drops

Shiva Lingam can be made or naturally formed



Lord Rama worshipping Shiva Lingam
(prepared with sand) at Rameshwaram



‘Swayambhu lingam’ at Amarnath
(formed due to freezing of water drops)

Sāligrāma Shila

- 'Sāligrāma shila / Shāligrām / Sālagrāma', a sacred stone worshipped as a representative / abstract form of Lord Vishnu, is another classic example
- These stones are the fossils of the common 'ammonite' that lived in the oceans / seas millions of years ago
- The marks on the shell of ammonite give a Sāligrāma its characteristic appearance, with the pattern often resembling the 'Sudarshan Chakra' (discus), 'Shankha' (conch shell) or 'Gada' (mace), all associated with Lord Vishnu



Sāligrāma Shila

- When people found Sāligrāma stones thousands of years ago, they recognized them as unique and must have related the stones to Lord Vishnu because of their characteristic markings and probably thought that they possessed divine qualities
- Since everyone could not afford to have a sculpture of Lord Vishnu at their homes, so people must have started worshipping Sāligrāma as a simplified representation / abstract form of Vishnu
- Sāligrāma stones of different shapes are often associated with the different 'avatars' or incarnations of Lord Vishnu
- Sāligrāma stones are available in different colors such as red, blue, yellow, green and black. Of these, the yellow, blue and black varieties are considered more sacred

Vaishno devi shrine



- Vaishno devi temple, one of the most popular pilgrimage centers, is another example where the Deities (Mother Kālī / Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati) are represented in an abstract form

Vaishno devi shrine

- There are no sculptures of Goddesses inside the Holy Cave. Instead, a **natural rock formation** with a single base and three cylindrical heads called as 'Pindies' (whose shape is similar to Shiva lingam) is worshipped
- Devotees visualize Mother Saraswati, Lakshmi and Kālī / Durga (not just a body part) in the Pindies from left to right respectively. The Goddesses / Pindies represent the supreme energies of creation, preservation / maintenance and dissolution
- Similarly, **several temples** in India, especially **in villages** have an abstract form / simplified representation of the various manifestations of Goddess Durga. Mostly, a **cylindrical or oval shaped structure** (similar to Shiva lingam) is smeared with turmeric paste & 'kumkuma' powder, wrapped with a saree and worshipped as Goddess

Another misinterpretation

- In another most common misinterpretation, Shiva lingam is regarded as 'union of lingam (phallus) and yoni (the female reproductive organ - uterus / vagina / genitalia)'. In Sanskrit, yoni means womb (uterus)
- Such a description of Shiva Lingam has not been mentioned in the scriptures - Vedas, Upanishads, Ramayana, MahaBharata, Bhagavad Gita,... (except for one controversial story in Shiva Purana)
- This interpretation means or assumes that Shiva and Parvathi (Shakti) are two separate entities, which is NOT correct

Shiva and Shakti

- We can try to understand the relationship between Shiva and Parvathi using the following analogy
- Fire emits energy in the form of 'light' and 'heat'
- These two forms of energy - light and heat cannot be separated from the fire (if there is no fire, then there is no heat / light)
- However, for the sake of simplicity, we study the properties of light and heat separately



Shiva and Shakti

Similarly, God has three forms of energy:

- **Māyā / Material energy / Nature**: with which Universe is created (kalpa ārambha), sustained and annihilated (Pralaya) and this cycle goes on. Creation (universe) is subject to continuous change
- **Jiva shakti / Spiritual energy**: comprises all the individual Souls. **Jivātma** / Soul, which imparts 'life' to a body (organism), is eternal and is NOT subject to change. Further description is available in the 2nd, 13th & 15th chapters of Bhagavad Gita
- **Yoga Māyā/ Ātma Māyā/ Ātma Yoga** (divine, inherent, mysterious power of God): by which God manifests in different forms (Saraswati-Brahma, Lakshmi-Vishnu, Parvathi-Shiva, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna,...), although **He pervades the entire universe** and the **entire universe is present within Him** (as Brahman)

Shiva and Shakti

Description of God's energies in Bhagavad Gita

Material energy / Nature / Māyā

भूमिरापोऽनलो वायुः खं मनो बुद्धिरेव च ।
अहङ्कार इतीयं मे भिन्ना प्रकृतिरष्टधा ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 4

Earth, water, fire, air, space / sky, mind, intellect and also ego - thus, these are the **eight different parts** of My nature (material energy)

मयाध्यक्षेण प्रकृतिः सूयते सचराचरम् ।
हेतुनानेन कौन्तेय जगद्विपरिवर्तते ॥

Gita Ch 9 ver 10

O son of Kunti, under My direction, nature gives birth to all the moving and stationary beings. For this reason (as per the laws of nature) the universe undergoes continuous changes (is created, maintained and dissolved again and again). Also refer verses 7.6-7; 9.8; **10.8**; 13.19/20; 14.3; 18.61

Shiva and Shakti

Jiva Shakti / Spiritual energy

अपरेयमितस्त्वन्यां प्रकृतिं विद्धि मे पराम् ।
जीवभूतां महाबाहो ययेदं धार्यते जगत् ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 5

However, O mighty armed one (Arjuna)! besides the lower material nature, know that I have another higher nature (spiritual energy), which comprises the individual souls (**Jivātma** - source of life in every living being) supporting the universe. Also refer verses 7.9; 10.20; 10.39; **14.4**; **15.7**

Just as humans wear clothes, individual Souls are embodied with the eight parts of material nature, refer Gita verse 2.22

Further description of **Soul** is provided in the following Gita verses: 2.13; **2.16-25**; 2.28; 2.30; 7.5-6; 7.9-10; 10.20; 10.39; 13.2/3; 13.19-22/20-23; 13.32-33/33-34; **15.7-11**; 15.16

Shiva and Shakti

एतद्योनीनि भूतानि सर्वाणीत्युपधारय ।
अहं कृत्स्नस्य जगतः प्रभवः प्रलयस्तथा ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 6

Understand that **these two natures (material and spiritual energies of God) are the wombs / source for all beings***. I am the source / cause of the creation as well as dissolution of the entire universe. Also refer verses 2.28; 7.7; 8.17-19; 9.7-8; 9.10; 9.17-19; 10.8; 10.32; 10.34; 11.32; 13.26/27; 14.3-4

(*while non-living beings are generated by material nature, all living beings are manifested by the combination of material nature and Soul / Jivātma)

Yoga-māyā / Ātma Māyā / Ātma Yoga

अजोऽपि सन्नव्ययात्मा भूतानामीश्वरोऽपि सन् ।
प्रकृतिं स्वामधिष्ठाय सम्भवाम्यात्ममायया ॥

Gita Ch 4 ver 6

Although I am birthless, imperishable (eternal, immutable) and the Lord of all beings (creation), yet, by governing / ruling over My own material energy / Nature, **I manifest Myself** (incarnate / take birth) through **Ātma-māyā / Yoga-māyā** (divine, inherent, mysterious power of God). Also refer verses 4.7-9; 7.25; 9.5; 11.47

Shiva and Shakti

- 'Nature' or 'Prakriti' which constitutes all the matter and energy of the universe, nourishes all the living beings
- Scriptures explicitly state that 'Nature' (Material energy of God) is the mother of all living beings and God is also the father (His Jiva Shakti / Spiritual energy provides the Soul)

सर्वयोनिषु कौन्तेय मूर्तयः सम्भवन्ति याः ।
तासां ब्रह्म महद्योनिरहं बीजप्रदः पिता ॥

Gita Ch 14 ver 4

O son of Kunti (Arjuna), whatever life-forms are born from all the wombs, the primordial matter (Brahman / Nature*) is their supreme womb (Mother) and I am the Father providing the seed of life (Soul / Jivātma). Also refer verses 7.6; 9.17; 10.39; 13.19/20; 13.26/27; 14.3 (*primordial matter / Brahman is the basis of Nature)

- Material energy of God is **personified** as Durga / Parvathi, Lakshmi, Saraswati (& other forms) and worshipped accordingly

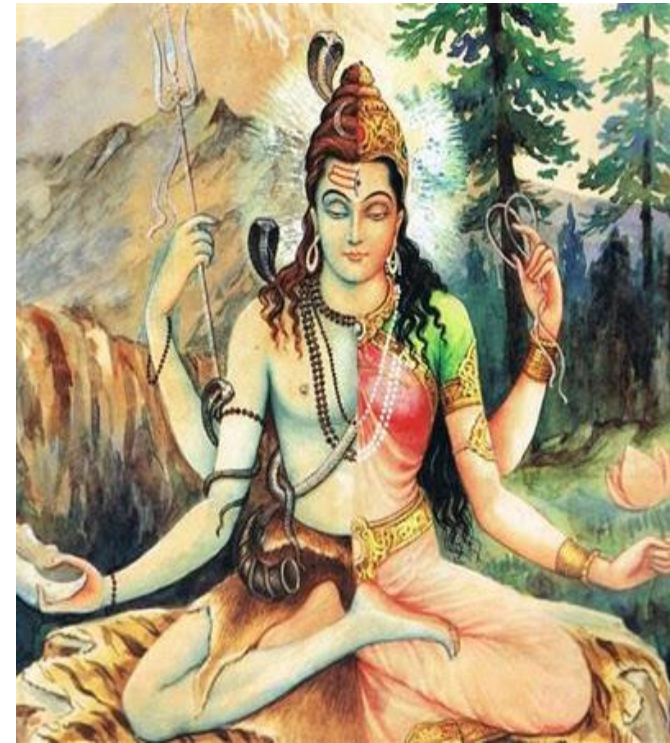
Shiva and Shakti

- Just as light and heat cannot be separated from fire, similarly Shakti (Parvathi) and Shiva cannot be separated. They are always ONE
- However, with His 'Yoga māya', God manifests in different forms as the beloved couples such as Parvathi-Shiva, Saraswati-Brahma, Lakshmi-Vishnu, Sita-Rama, Radha-Krishna,...with a **definite purpose / reason** for each of the manifestation / incarnation
- For the common people and beginners of spiritual journey, the divine couple are related as our parents so that we can worship with love & affection (**is it not absurd to visualize / represent just their reproductive organs for worship?**)
- Scriptures describe that the **left half of Shiva represents Parvathi**. Similarly, in the manifestation as Vishnu, mother Lakshmi is seated in His chest and represents His heart

Shiva and Shakti : Ardhanārēswara

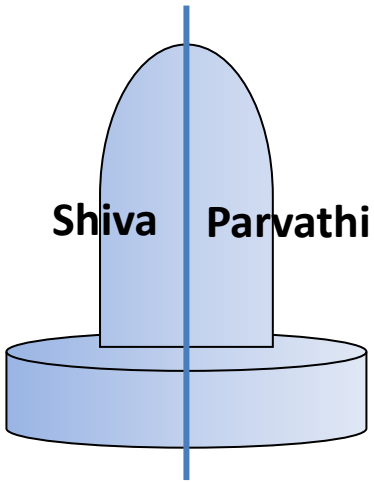


Scriptures state that
the left half of Shiva
represents Parvathi



Similarly, in the manifestation as Vishnu,
mother Lakshmi represents His heart

Shiva and Shakti



represents
Parvathi

- Hence, we can assume that the left half of Shiva lingam represents mother Parvathi
- In another description, the red dot made with kumkum, at the center of '*tripundra*' (Shaivite tilak) represents mother Parvathi
- The three horizontal lines, drawn with '*Vibhuti*' (sacred ash) are variously understood to represent many things: creation-preservation-dissolution; the three modes of time (past-present-future); the three forms of God's energy (Jiva shakti, Māyā, Yoga māyā); three qualities (gunas) in nature (satva-rajastamas); Yoga, knowledge and devotion; *satchit-ananda*;

Missing circular base



The 'Swayambhu lingam' at Amarnath does not have the circular base



- It is important to note that in some ancient temples, the Shiva lingam does not have the circular base

What does the circular base represent ?

- During the nitya puja / daily worship, God is invoked in the picture or sculpture by reciting '*mantra*' (a sacred sentence) which is followed by the rituals such as offering seat (āsana), water, performing bath (abhishekam), offering food, flowers, light (diya, deepam),...
- Abhishekam is performed using different materials such as water, milk, curd (yogurt), ghee (clarified butter), honey, sugar, various fruit juices, sandal wood paste,...
- Since God is invoked in the sculpture, all the materials used for abhishekam are also extremely sacred and should NOT be discarded. All the materials should be collected and consumed as '*thērtham*' (holy water)

What does the circular base represent ?

- Abhishekam is performed with different materials to all the Deities (Shiva, Parvathi, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Ganesh,...) regularly
- Performing abhishekam to the life-size sculptures of the Deities and collecting all the materials carefully is a little difficult job



Performing abhishekam to the huge sculptures of the Deities and collecting all the materials carefully is difficult

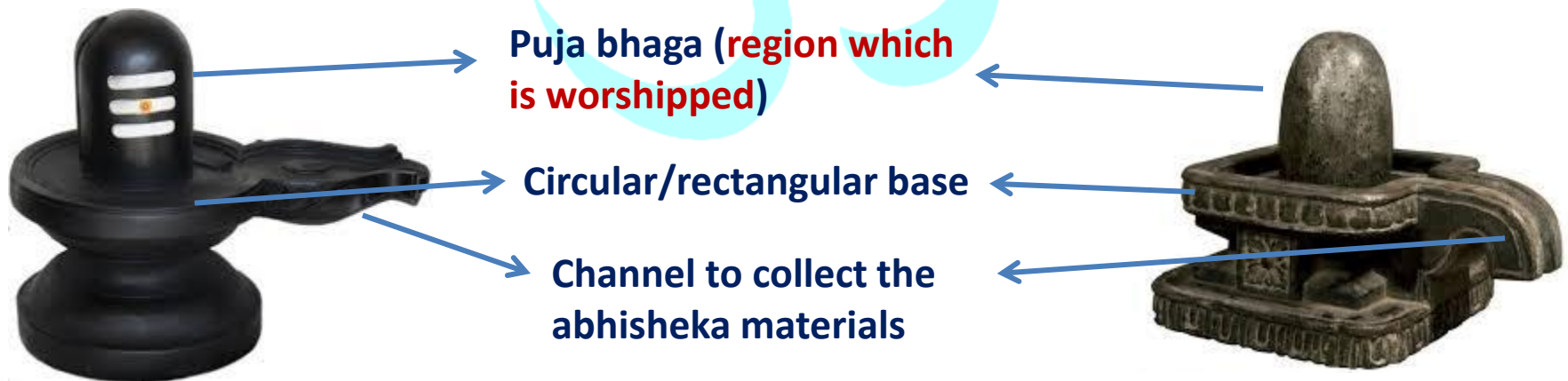


Priests performing abhishekam to Lord Venkateswara



What does the circular base represent ?

- However, it is relatively easier to perform the abhishekam to Shiva Lingam and probably this could be one of the reasons for its extreme popularity
- As per the scriptures, only the cylindrical pillar region is worshipped
- So the **base**, commonly represented in circular / rectangular shape along with a channel, is probably **meant for just collecting the sacred abhisheka materials**



Visual representation of Shiva Lingam



We can visualize lingam as Lord Shiva in meditation posture (the central pillar representing His head and trunk while the circular base representing His folded legs)



Puja bhaga
(region which is worshipped)



may also represent Parvathi

Or only the cylindrical pillar, which is worshipped (as Puja Bhaga) represents Lord Shiva along with Parvathi

Visual representation of Shiva Lingam

- Most importantly, it does NOT matter which representation is the correct one
- Scriptures explicitly state that God is omnipresent and **could be visualized in any form** for the sake of worship
- The Sanskrit proverb “Yad bhavam tad bhavati” could also be applied here, i.e., we can visualize **any beloved form of the Lord in the lingam** which is **most pleasant to us** and that image will be fixed permanently in our mind / heart

यो यो यां यां तनुं भक्तः श्रद्धयार्चितुमिच्छति ।
तस्य तस्याचलां श्रद्धां तामेव विदधाम्यहम् ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 21

Whichever form (Deity) any devotee desires to worship with concentration and faith, indeed I stabilize (make firm and unwavering) his/her focus and trust on that particular form / Deity. Also refer verses 4.11; 7.22

Jyotir-lingam: Pillar of light, Brahman

- Jyotir-linga shrines are temples where, it is believed that, Lord Shiva appeared as a fiery column / pillar of light (also referred as '**Lingodbhavam**' meaning 'emergence of the Lingam'). At these temples, the **lingam represents the beginning-less and endless 'Stambha' (pillar) of light**, symbolizing the infinite nature of Shiva
- This is in accordance with the belief that once (on Shivarātri) Lord Shiva appeared as an Infinite Pillar of Light piercing the universe
- At the Paris Congress of History of Religions, Swami Vivekananda mentioned about the specific hymn in the Atharva-Veda Samhita sung in praise of the **Yupa-Stambha**, the sacrificial post placed in Vedic rituals as the symbol of **eternal Brahman**. The hymn contains description of a beginning-less and endless **Stambha or Skambha**. Eventually, miniature versions of the stambha/pillar, placed and worshipped by the common people, could have evolved into Lingam

Jyotir-lingam: Pillar of Brahman, Dharma

- In another description, the fire rising in the shape of a pillar (during the performance of Yagna / Homam), represents 'Brahman'
- The term 'Dharma' refers to 'upholding duty & righteousness' and can be symbolized by a pillar which usually holds weight. Thus Shiva lingam could also represent the universal pillar of Dharma
- Several such 'pillars' (usually as a simple cylindrical stone) have been found in ancient temples and historic sites, probably worshipped as a **simplified representation of the pillar of light / Lord Shiva / Brahman / Dharma**



A 'stambha' with the sculpture of Lord Shiva

Lord Shiva emerging from Jyotir-lingam



Lord Shiva emerging from the 'pillar of light' at Airavatesvara Temple, Tamil Nadu

Lingam : Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

- In another description, the lingam / stambha (pillar) consists of three parts, representing Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva



Rudra / Shiva bhaga*
(cylindrical)

Vishnu bhaga (Octagonal)

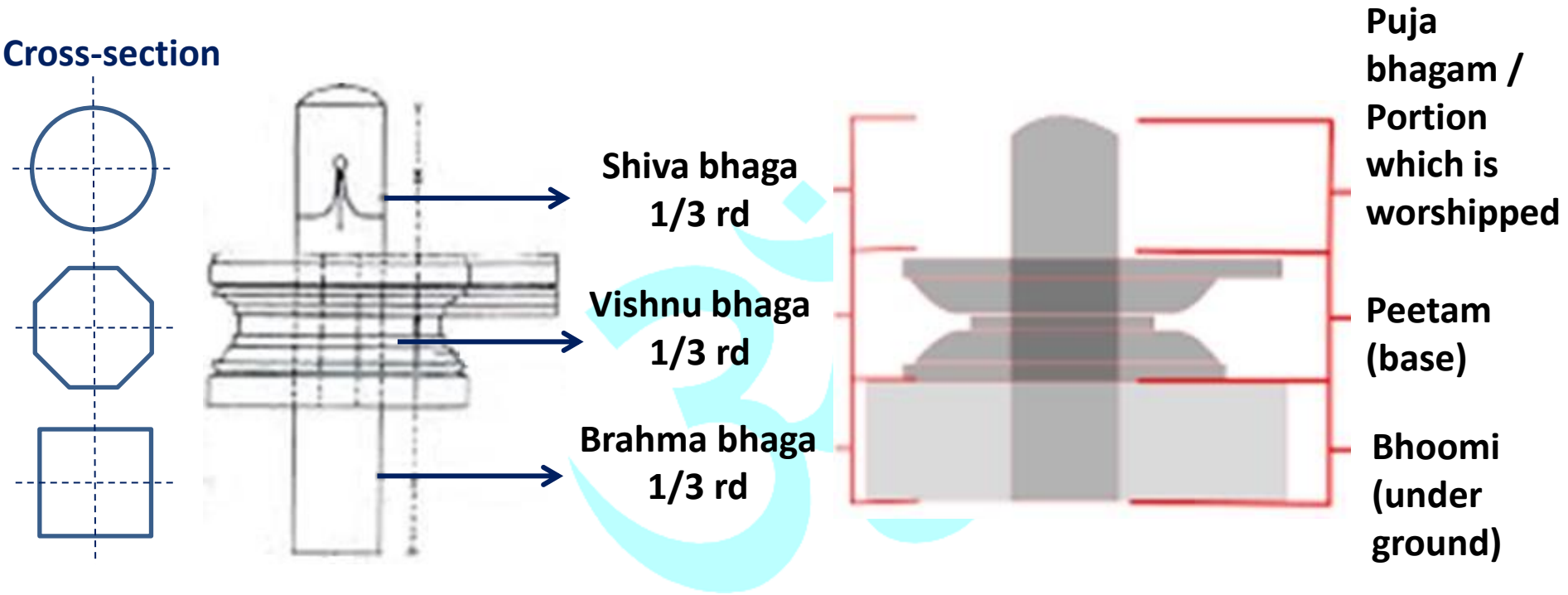
Brahma bhaga (square)

*bhaga: portion / part

- It is interesting to note that 'Lord Narasimha' (incarnation of Vishnu) had also emerged from a 'pillar' (according to popular belief)



Lingam : Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva



- Hence, **lingam** can also be regarded as a **simplified representation** or an abstract form of **Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva**

Lingam : Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

- In support of the above description, Sri Krishna states in Bhagavad Gita that He manifests as Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva (Chapters 10, 11)

आदित्यानामहं विष्णुर्ज्योतिषां रविरंशुमान् ।
मरीचिर्मरुतामस्मि नक्षत्राणामहं शशी ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 21

Among the Ādityas, **I am Vishnu**; among luminous objects, **the radiant sun**; I am Marichi (the chief) among the Maruts / winds; and among stars, I am the **Moon** (here 'stars' refers to all the glowing objects at night, of which Moon is the prominent one). Also refer verses 10.31; 10.37

रुद्राणां शङ्करश्चास्मि वित्तेशो यक्षरक्षसाम् ।
वसूनां पावकश्चास्मि मेरुः शिखरिणामहम् ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 23

And among the Rudras, **I am Shankara (Lord Shiva)**; the Lord of wealth (Kubera) among the Yaksha-Rakshasas (guardians of places, treasures); and among the Vasus (elements of nature), **I am fire**; I am Meru among the lofty mountains

Lingam : Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

अक्षराणामकारोऽस्मि द्वन्द्वः सामासिकस्य च ।

अहमेवाक्षयः कालो धाताहं विश्वतोमुखः ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 33

Among letters, I am the vowel 'A' (the first letter in Indian languages); and the dual / copulative compound (dvandva) among compound word formations in grammar; I alone am the **eternal Time**; I am the sustainer facing all directions (**four-faced Brahma**)

पिताहमस्य जगतो माता धाता पितामहः ।

वेद्यं पवित्रमोङ्कार ऋक्साम यजुरेव च ॥

Gita Ch 9 ver 17

I am the **father, mother, sustainer and grandfather** of this universe. I am the **One to be known** (ultimate goal of knowledge), the purifier, the sacred syllable '**Om**', and also the Rig, Sāma and Yajur Vedas. Also refer verses 7.8; 10.25

- The above descriptions could be understood by the most common example found in many spiritual texts i.e., same person has different roles at home, work place and society / neighborhood
- Similarly, only one God has different forms for creation (Brahma), preservation / maintenance (Vishnu) and dissolution (Shiva). However, as mentioned earlier, the manifestations of God are infinite

Lingam : Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva

- There is an interesting story about the relationship between Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva
- During the wedding ceremony of Shiva with Parvathi, priests asked Shiva to state His father's name. Shiva replied 'Brahma is my father'. When asked about grandfather's name, Shiva replied 'Vishnu is my grandfather'. When asked about great-grandfather, Shiva replied 'I am the father of Vishnu'
- The **most important message: There is only ONE God who is formless and also has infinite forms simultaneously**
- Although it may sound confusing, God manifests in infinite forms with His Yoga māya (which is beyond human comprehension)

Shiva Lingam - an abstract form of God



Therefore, Shiva Lingam is **also** a simplified representation of the **formless Brahman** / **Paramātmā** and God's **infinite** manifestations

Which form is superior ?

- Although worship of a form of God (as a picture, sculpture) is preferred for the beginners, we should not be obsessed with it leading to arguments over which form of God is superior
- There have been several conflicts over the superiority of Vishnu and Shiva leading to the negative propaganda that Hinduism is a polytheistic religion associated with only idol worship, blind superstitions and meaningless rituals
- Just as students move up in school every year from one grade to another, similarly, in spiritual journey we should always strive to move up
- It is extremely important to read scriptures (at least **Gita** & **Ramayana**) to clear our doubts / misunderstandings regarding spirituality, Sanātana Dharma and its traditions

Shiva Lingam - an important reminder

- It is mentioned in Ramayana that Hanuman is Lord Shiva's incarnation
- While Hanuman is a great devotee of Lord Rama, Rama Himself worships Shiva Lingam. Then Who is superior ?
- Hanuman has permanently placed the beloved Sita-Rama in His heart and is constantly worshipping Them with His mind
- It is very important to note that God can be conceptualized and worshipped in any beloved form. A **pure heart / mind** and steadfast **devotion** are all that matters (e.g. Hanuman)



Shiva Lingam - an important reminder

- Lord Shiva, through Lingam, is instructing us to realize and **experience God everywhere** and in **every living being** (for which we should not discriminate people based on religion, caste, race, skin color, region, language, profession, financial status,..)
- Although pictures, sculptures (of God), temples and rituals are helpful in the beginning stages of spiritual journey, ultimately, we have to worship Him in our heart / mind
- Note: During Rudrābhishekam, ‘Mahanyāsam’ and/or ‘Laghunyāsam’ are recited to **purify our body & mind** and also to **invoke Lord Shiva (Rudra)** within ourselves
- Shiva Lingam (and other such symbols, e.g. ‘Om’) **constantly reminds** us about the **formless** aspect of God (Nirguna & nirākār Brahman / Paramātmā)

Shiva Lingam - elements of Nature & Life

- While Jyothir-linga temples and temples of Swayambhu-lingam are popular based on the belief that Lord Shiva manifested at those sites, He also pervades the entire universe as the '**Brahman**' (minutest 'God' particle present in every atom - Gita verse **8.9**), and is the **essence / basis of all the natural elements**
- Hence, in several Shiva temples (in India), Lingams representing each of the natural elements are being worshipped, e.g. Prithvi Lingam (earth), Jala Lingam (water), Vayu Lingam (wind), Agni Lingam (fire), Akasa Lingam (sky / space), Surya Lingam (Sun), Chandra Lingam (Moon),...
- Similarly, Ātma Lingam (representing the Soul / Jivātma present in every living being), Moksha Lingam (representing the ultimate goal of human life) are also worshipped

Shiva Lingam - elements of Nature & Life

The same description is explicitly provided in Bhagavad Gita

रसोऽहमप्सु कौन्तेय प्रभास्मि शशिसूर्ययोः ।
प्रणवः सर्ववेदेषु शब्दः खे पौरुषं नृषु ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 8

O son of Kunti (Arjuna)! I am the **essence (fluidity, subtle taste) of water and the radiance of the Moon and Sun. I am the sacred primordial syllable 'Om' in all the Vedas, sound in the sky / space and courage / valor in humans**

पुण्यो गन्धः पृथिव्यां च तेजश्चास्मि विभावसौ ।
जीवनं सर्वभूतेषु तपश्चास्मि तपस्विषु ॥

Gita Ch 7 ver 9

I am the **pure fragrance (subtle, good / pleasant smell) of the earth and the brightness / heat of fire. I am the life in all living beings and austerity / penance of the ascetics**

Also refer verses 7.7; 9.16; 10.21; 10.23-25; 10.30-31; 10.33; 10.35; 15.12-13

Shiva Lingam - elements of Nature & Life

पवनः पवतामस्मि रामः शस्त्रभृतामहम् ।
झषाणां मकरश्चास्मि स्रोतसामस्मि जाह्नवी ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 31

I am the **wind among purifiers / fast-movers**; I am Rama among warriors; and among aquatic creatures, I am Makara* (crocodile); among rivers, I am Ganga.

*Makara is also described as a mythological sea dragon or water-monster, half terrestrial and half aquatic, with crocodile's jaws, elephant's trunk, lion's feet, fish's scales and flexible body, and peacock's tail

अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वभूताशयस्थितः ।
अहमादिश्च मध्यं च भूतानामन्त एव च ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 20

O Gudākesha (conqueror of sleep - Arjuna)! I am the **Soul** residing in the heart of all living beings. I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings.

All living beings are created by God (by the combination of matter / Natural elements and Soul - His material and spiritual energies), sustained by God and our journey through the cycles of birth and death also ends by attaining God - our final abode

Shiva Lingam - elements of Nature & Life

प्रह्लादश्चास्मि दैत्यानां कालः कलयतामहम् ।
मृगाणां च मृगेन्द्रोऽहं वैनतेयश्च पक्षिणाम् ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 30

Also, I am Prahlāda among Daityas (demons); **I am Time** among reckoners / subduers (no one and nothing in the universe can stand against TIME); and among beasts, I am the lion; and Garuda among birds. Also refer verse 10.33

Lord Shiva is also regarded as the God of Time - *Trikaleshwar*, and Time itself - *Mahakal*. So we should never waste Time !!

अहं सर्वस्य प्रभवो मत्तः सर्वं प्रवर्तते ।
इति मत्वा भजन्ते मां बुधा भावसमन्विताः ॥

Gita Ch 10 ver 8

I am the **source of the entire creation, and everything (universe) is functioning / operating because of Me**. Realizing this, the wise, filled with devotional fervor (unconditional love, faith and respect) worship Me.

Shiva Lingam - elements of Nature & Life

- Worship of Shiva Lingam as a manifestation of various natural elements is extremely important to **constantly remind people** about the **dependency of our lives / existence on nature**
- Hence, one of the best ways to worship Lord Shiva is by conservation of natural resources (it should be a sincere / whole-hearted effort)
- **Everyone can serve nature by**
 - **NOT wasting natural resources** - food, water, energy (electricity & fuel), paper (trees) and also Time !!
 - Reducing pollution via **segregating and recycling waste materials** - paper, plastic, glass, metal (old machines, devices), converting bio-degradable waste into compost
 - **Educating others** on environment; Planting trees (**Reforestation**)
 - Protection / conservation of forests, water bodies (rivers, lakes,..)

Worshipping Lord Shiva

- Performing abhishekam to Shiva Lingam has been an extremely popular method of worshipping Lord Shiva since ancient times
- During Rudrābhishekam, Lord Shiva is invoked in the Lingam as well as within ourselves (by the recitation of Mahanyāsam and/or Laghunyāsam). Just as we take bath once in the morning, it would be better if we **perform abhishekam ONCE** to the Lord instead of hundreds of times every morning (in the temples)
- All the **materials used for abhishekam** are **extremely sacred** and hence **should NOT be discarded**. The materials should be carefully collected and distributed among the devotees, family & friends
- Hence, extreme care should be taken to keep the **area of worship** (temple premises, puja area at home), **articles used for abhishekam / worship very clean** and also maintain cleanliness during the process

Worshipping Lord Shiva

- The arrangement (channels, pipes or any other system) to collect abhisheka material should be cleaned every time, before the abhishekam is started
- We should **clean our hands thoroughly** before performing abhishekam (and strictly **maintain personal hygiene**)
- We should also **pay attention to the amount of materials** such as milk, curd / yogurt, ghee (clarified butter), honey, sugar, various fruit juices to be used for abhishekam, as they should be **completely consumed after abhishekam** as 'thērtham'
- Water used for abhishekam after applying sandal wood paste and 'Vibhuti' to the Lingam could be collected separately, and it should be sprinkled on ourselves, in our homes and the remainder could be used for watering plants, trees

Worshipping Lord Shiva

- Lord Shiva is the God for destruction / dissolution. In order to obtain His grace, we should sincerely pray and try to **destroy / dissolve** the following **barriers** between us and the Lord. His third eye represents knowledge and wisdom
 - **Social barriers** and the **discrimination** created and **deeply rooted** in our mind based on religion, caste, race, skin color, appearance, nation, region, language, gender, profession, financial status, affiliations,.. (Lord Shiva is present in **every** living being as Paramātmā)
 - **Ego, Arrogance, Jealousy, Hatred, Anger and Vengeance**
 - **Desires** for materialistic pleasures which include not only **lust** but also **wealth, power / position and fame** (Lord Shiva is an ascetic)
- Even Lord Rama and Sita (during their stay in forest and after separation from each other), Buddha, Mahavira, Moses, Jesus Christ, Guru Nanak, Shirdi Sai Baba, several Saints, Spiritual masters, devotees* and noble people have **led an extremely simple life**

*Prahlad, Ambarish, Janak, Vibhishan were Kings, but remained unattached to materialistic pleasures and performed their duties as a service to God

Worshipping Lord Shiva with Ramayana

- Ādi-kavi, Maharshi Valmiki is considered as the first author of Ramayana in the current Mahayuga (cycle of creation)
- However, many cycles of creation & dissolution have passed before (currently, we are in the 51st year of Brahma and one day for Him comprises of 1000 Mahayugas) and God has incarnated as Rama in every cycle in different worlds / planets
- It is mentioned in Ramcharitmanas that **Lord Shiva is the first author of Ramayana** which He narrated to mother Parvathi
- Hence, **studying (reading, listening, watching) Ramayana with devotion is one of the best ways of worshipping and expressing our gratitude to Lord Shiva** (refer Gita Ch 4 ver 33; ch 9 ver 15)
- Several good translations of Ramayana are available in print and online e.g. www.readramayana.org www.valmikiramayana.net

Lord Shiva's gift to mankind

- Although several movies and TV serials are available, the Ramayan series produced by Ramanand Sagar in the late 1980s is very good in terms of content. It is produced in Hindi and later dubbed in other Indian languages (available online)
- Interestingly, there is also another **famous mantra or gift to the mankind provided by Lord Shiva**. When Parvathi asked Shiva - how devotees can chant 1000 names of Vishnu (Vishnu Sahasranāma) without fail, and if there is any **alternative and easy** method that would include the power of all these thousand names, **Lord Shiva replied that *chanting Rama's name with devotion is equivalent to reciting the 1000 names of Vishnu**

**Srīrāma rāma rāmēti ramē rāmē manōramē
sahasranāmatattulyaṁ rāmanāma varānanē**

Om sri SitāRāmāya namaha !

***also refer the story of Valmiki**

Lord Shiva - Welfare of the Universe

- Another popular story is about Lord Shiva's blue neck. During the churning of ocean by Devas and Asuras, the most lethal poison (Hālahala) emerged from the ocean before 'Amrita' (the nectar of immortality). As it is capable of destroying the entire creation, everyone prayed to Lord Shiva for help / protection
- Out of compassion Lord Shiva drank the poison for the welfare of the universe. While devas and asuras fought for the 'amrita' but no one wanted (or is capable to handle) the poison. Another e.g. mother Sita, who left the palace as per people's opinion
- Similarly, most of the people only want the pleasant things in life but not the problems. But those **people who face different types of problems** (troubles, pain, suffering, humiliation,..) in their lives, but still **try to fulfill their duties / responsibilities** and **work for the welfare of the society** would definitely reach Lord Shiva

Lord Shiva - Welfare of the Universe

- The practice of worshipping God (in our most beloved form) even for a few minutes gives us the strength & courage to endure the pain and suffering (or to face the problems, challenges) and also gives us hope for a better and peaceful future
- It is very important to note that **Lord Shiva didn't swallow the poison, but He held it in His throat.** Similarly, we should not let ourselves drown in the problems of life
- **We may not be able to change our circumstances (or problems of life), but we can decide that they won't dominate us.** We should face the difficulties / challenges with a **strong & positive attitude**
- The above statement is very easy to say but hard to implement in our lives (i.e., to control our mind). However, **Meditation**, which is one of the most effective methods to control our senses, mind and intellect, will be extremely helpful to attain equanimity

Worshipping Lord Shiva by Meditation

- Meditation is a great way to enhance concentration, **eliminate negative thoughts / feelings, control anger** and reduce stress
- It helps in calming the mind and to **focus on the purpose of our life** amid all the agitation and sorrow of the world
- Lord Shiva is mostly in meditation and it is believed that **waves of energy / Shakti (personified as Parvathi) radiate from Him spreading His grace, love and wisdom to all**
- Meditating on Lord Shiva purifies our mind & thoughts ('Shankara' is derived from 'Sama' - auspiciousness; 'kara' - who brings). His two eyes represent love and justice, while the third one on His forehead is the spiritual eye / eye of knowledge and wisdom (to destroy our materialistic desires, ego, hatred, fear,..)

Shiva Lingam - Meditation

- To visualize / concentrate on Shiva Lingam during meditation is very beneficial, as we are not only focusing on the beloved form of God but also being aware of His formless aspect (Brahman)
- Along with meditation, a constant effort to improve spiritual knowledge by **reading scriptures** (especially **Gita** & **Ramayana**) is required to strengthen our devotion (includes unconditional love, unflinching faith, gratitude, humility, determination, discipline, selfless service, utmost attention, courage & self-confidence)
- Contemplating on **ethics** and **virtues** (as described in **Ramayana** such as upholding Dharma / righteousness, honesty, dedication to duties - always striving for perfection at work, devotion, self-restraint, non-violence, forgiveness, valor..) helps in **purifying** our intellect, mind (thoughts, ideas, opinions, decisions) and senses

Shiva Lingam - Meditation

- Contemplation of spiritual concepts helps in opening the inner eye (strengthening our conscience), expanding our spiritual awareness bringing deep peace and steadiness to the mind and body. Also enables us to experience our 'Soul / Ātma Lingam' (aligns the body, mind & intellect with the Soul and finally God)
- It also strengthens our mind / reasoning ability and helps us to make right choices, in addition to using compassion and love in all the important decisions of life
- It is through spiritual knowledge and meditation, that several saints and devotees could experience the cosmic energy or the Supreme consciousness (Brahman / Paramātmā)
- Bhagavad Gita has a chapter (#6) on meditation and self-control

Bhagavad Gita - Meditation

यतो यतो निश्चरति मनश्चञ्चलमस्थिरम् ।
ततस्ततो नियम्यैतदात्मन्येव वशं नयेत् ॥

Gita Ch 6 ver 26

Whenever and wherever the restless / fickle and unsteady mind wanders, from there (all thoughts of materialistic desires and negativity such as hatred, vengeance), it must be withdrawn / restrained and brought under the control of the self (fixed on God) alone.

असंशयं महाबाहो मनो दुर्निग्रहं चलम् ।
अभ्यासेन तु कौन्तेय वैराग्येण च गृह्यते ॥

Gita Ch 6 ver 35

O mighty-armed one (Arjuna), it is undoubtedly very difficult to restrain the restless / unsteady mind. However, O son of Kunti, it can be disciplined by **diligent practice (of meditation), perseverance and detachment / renunciation** (of ego, materialistic desires, fear and negative feelings - anger, hatred, vengeance, jealousy)

Life is full of dualities (pairs of opposites): joy & sorrow; honor & humiliation; success & failure; victory & defeat; profit & loss; birth & death; creation & destruction. **Meditation & spiritual knowledge help us to bear these opposites** with a calm mind and not let them destroy our mental equilibrium (refer verses 2.14; 2.38; 6.7; 12.18-19; 14.24-25)

Bhagavad Gita - Meditation

जितात्मनः प्रशान्तस्य परमात्मा समाहितः ।
शीतोष्णसुखदुःखेषु तथा मानापमानयोः ॥

Gita Ch 6 ver 7

One who has conquered the mind and concentrates on Supreme-Soul (God) is serene (perfectly calm and peaceful) while experiencing the dualities of life - happiness & sorrow as well as honor & humiliation which come and go like the continuously changing seasons of cold and hot temperatures

वीतरागभयक्रोधा मन्मया मामुपाश्रिताः ।
बहवो ज्ञानतपसा पूता मद्भावमागताः ॥

Gita Ch 4 ver 10

Leaving / freed from **AFFECTION** (liking, worldly desires / attachments), **FEAR** and **ANGER**; being filled with Me and taking refuge in Me (surrendering to Me), many people **became purified by Gnana-Tapasa** (austerity / fire of knowledge) and attained divine state with transcendental love & devotion for Me

Gnana-Tapasa refers to studying / obtaining knowledge and also spreading it to others for the welfare of the society (also refer Gita verses 4.28; **4.33**; 9.15; **18.68-71**)

Bhagavad Gita - Meditation

अभ्यासयोगयुक्तेन चेतसा नान्यगामिना ।
परमं पुरुषं दिव्यं याति पार्थानुचिन्तयन् ॥

Gita Ch 8 ver 8

O Partha (Arjuna)! one whose mind is disciplined by the practice of Yoga* and does not wander after anything else (materialistic desires, issues), is constantly engaged in contemplation of divine, supreme Lord (and His advice), attains Him. Also refer verse 8.14 (*Karma Yoga, Gnana Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Raja Yoga, Patanjali Yoga Sutras,..)

Also refer the following verses in Gita

Dualities of life: 2.14-15; 2.38; 2.45; 4.22; 5.3; 5.20; 5.22; 6.7; 7.27-28; 12.13; 12.18-19; 14.24-25; 15.5

Get rid of desires, anger, fear: 2.55-56; 2.64; 2.71; 3.34; 4.10; 5.23; 5.26; 5.28; 6.18; 6.24; 15.5; 16.21-22; 18.53

Controlling the senses & mind: 2.41; 2.45; 2.53; 2.57-59; 2.61-65; 2.67-71; 3.6-7; 3.34; 3.41-43; 4.21; 4.26-27; 4.39; 5.20-28; 6.4-8; 6.10-26; 6.35-36; 8.5-14; 9.14; 12.2-4; 12.8-9; 12.13-19; 13.7-11/8-12; 15.3-5; 16.1-3; 17.14-16; 18.33; 18.36-37; 18.49; 18.51-54; 18.57

Shiva Lingam - Realization

- It is believed that on Shivarātri (at midnight), Lord Shiva appeared as a fiery, infinite pillar of light (referred as 'Lingodbhavam' meaning 'emergence of the Lingam') and then emerged / manifested from the lingam (pillar of light) in the beloved humanly form in His full glory
- The ultimate goal of worship and meditation is to experience / discover Lingodbhavam (achieve enlightenment / awaken the divinity) within ourselves, i.e., to realize and experience the presence of God (as Paramātmā, Brahman) within ourselves, everywhere and love Him unconditionally

Om sri UmaMaheshwarabhyam namaha

Om sri LakshmiNarayanabhyam namaha

Om namah Shivaya !!