

IDOL WORSHIP

“Each one of us is heir apparent to the Emperor of Emperors, the Ishwara”.

ISHWARA is the only one supreme God to a Hindu. The Supreme is described as that from which the entire universe of names and forms has arisen. That in which the world continues to exist and that unto which alone the world will ultimately merge. There is no question of having any other God as *ISHWARA* (*ISHWARA* is also known as *Devathay/Devadu/Ishwaran/Kadavul/Iraivan*) is omnipotent and omnipresent, who needs no partner to discharge his duties. Veda sloka says:

ईश्वरः परमैकस्वरूपः ॥

स नित्यः सर्वव्यापी विभुरनादिरनन्तश्च स निराकारो निरूपो वर्णनातीतो निष्कम्पश्च ।

क्वचित् शब्दरूपेण स आत्मानं प्रकाशयति स विधाता

कारणानां कारणं तथा सर्वशक्तिमान् तदिच्छापुरणाय कस्यापि सहायस्य प्रयोजनं न वर्तते

यती द्वितीयः कोऽपि नास्ति ॥

Īśvaraḥ paramaikasvarūpaḥ,

Sa nityaḥ sarvavyāpī vibhuranādiranantaśca sa

nirākāro nirūpo varṇānatīto niṣkampaśca,

kvacit śabdārūpeṇa sa ātmānaṁ prakāśayati sa vidhātā

kāraṇānāṁ kāraṇaṁ tathā sarvaśaktimān tadicchāpuraṇāya kasyāpi

sahāyasya prayojanaṁ na vartate

yatī dvitīyaḥ ko’pi nāsti.

Ishwara is one supreme entity. He is absolute, all pervading and eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He has no form, colour or description. Sometimes in the form of sound, He manifests Himself. He is the creator, the cause of causes. He is all-powerful and does not require assistance from anyone else to carry out his desire. Why ? None else but He ever exists.

This supreme reality is *Ishwara* which is also called *Vishnu*. One should not confuse *Vishnu* with *Bishnu* and *Brahma* with *Bramha*. *Bishnu* and

Bramha were first prophets of *Sanatana Dharma*. One should be careful as the similarity of spelling sometimes creates confusion. The word *Vishnu* originates from the root *VIS* meaning to pervade. *Vishnu* is all-pervading. *Ishwara* has no beginning and no end.

Ishwara did not required a parent. It is not parents but the human beings who gave the supreme entity a name i.e. *Ishwara*. People of various religions call him by various names. Hindus called him *Ishwara / Vishnu / Brahma / Devadu / Ishwaran / Kadavul / Iraivan* etc. The symbol of *Ishwara* is ‘ॐ’ (**Om**).

Veda says :

ईश्वरः तस्य दूतरूपेण पृथिव्यां प्रेरयति देवान्
तस्माच्च मङ्गलं मनुष्यत्वं प्राप्नोति ॥

Īśvaraḥ tasya dūtārūpeṇa pṛithivyāṁ prerayati devān
tasmācca maṅgalaṁ manuṣyatvaṁ prāpnoti.

Ishwara sends devtas as his messengers to regions of the world from where good accrues to humanity.

The Hindus believe that *Ishwara* sends a part of himself as messiah (*Devata*) to the people of the world so that men and women are guided towards more fulfilling, harmonious human life. *Devatas* are human messiahs.

These messiahs are treated by Hindus as replicas of *Ishwara* and they are called *Devata*. They are greatly loved and respected Hindu heroes and heroines. The Hindus believe that after their *LILA* (i.e. worldly life as a mortal human being) in this world they go back to merge with *Ishwara*.

The Hindus believe that even when the *Devatas* are not present in this world, they can still guide and help. The Hindus make statues of the messiah and pray to *Ishwara* using them as media. These messiahs are known as idols or *Devatas*.

The Hindus know that the idol is not *ISHWARA*. It is only a medium to concentrate on *Ishwara* and showing respect to the image is actually praying to the Almighty through the known image of *Ishwara*.

Any one will salute his national flag wherever in the world he may find it. Every one knows the national flag is only a piece of fabric and colour and

not the nation. However, one is prepared to even lay down his life if he finds that his national flag is being insulted. Respecting the national flag is an example of idol worship.

No one prays to the stone statue but prays to *Ishwara*. That is the reason why before all mantras (hymn) one first says Om i.e., 'ॐ' which means in Sanskrit "*Ishwara* is the greatest".

Hindus immerse their idol after worship to prove that the statue of the idol is not important. To concentrate one's mind on the concept of *Ishwara's* image through the idol is useful.

Super human achievements in the use of weapons or in the field of knowledge were exaggerated by story-tellers who created myths about the *Devatas*. Overzealous artists and sculptors gave unnatural form to suit their metaphorical and wild imagination. All *Devatas* were human beings and none were above natural law. All *Devatas* had one head and two hands. Hindu hymns (mantra) explain this as :

त्रिमस्तकानां ज्ञानम् एकशिरे अवस्थितं
चतुर्बाहुतुल्यबलं द्विहस्ते रोपितम् ॥
भक्तेच्छापूर्णार्थं पुनः पुनः आविर्भूतम्
प्रणमामि त्वां हि ईश्वरप्रेरितदूतम् ॥

Trimastakānām jñānam ekaśire avasthitam
catur bāhutulya balam dvihaste ropitam
bhaktecchā pūraṇārtham punaḥ punaḥ āvirbhūtam
praṇamāmi tāvṃ hi Īśvara prerita dūtam.

Oh Ishwara you sent messiahs in human form time and again. This messiahs are very wise and in their one head they have the capabilities of three heads. Their two hands are powerful enough to work as if four hands are working. We all bow to these Ishwara's messengers.

In the course of the last 20000 years, the Hindus were bestowed with many messiahs / prophets and treated them as the incarnation of the *Adi-devtas* (*BRAHMA*, *BISHNU* and *MAHESHWAR*). For example *Ram* who was born about 5000 years back and *Krishna* who was born about 3500 years back are both treated as incarnations of *Bishnu* and receive homage, love and respect.

A Hindu loves *Ishwara* and would always like to be near *Ishwara*. That is

why ordinary Hindus who have not read the Vedas and Gita, worship Idols. Those who have knowledge of Vedas and Gita, know that *Ishwara* is the only God. *HE* deserves everything that a human being can offer. Idols are only *HIS* representations. It is only proper to pray to *Ishwara*.

When Hinduism was expanding it tolerated and assimilated all tribes and sections of people of various parts of the world and had shown respect to their way of life and their heroes, their idols. As a result, many idols have come to be regarded as Hindu idols. These idols may be revered by one section of Hindus when another section may not even know of its existence and may not even appreciate such idols. Name of the God as per dialect also varies.

In north India God is worshipped as *Ishwara*, where as in southern states of India they are worshipped as *Murthy/Vigraham* (idol), *Ishwara/Ishwaradu* (God), *Lord Venkateswara/Lord Balaji* (*Bishnu*), *Murugan/Shanmukhal Kumar Swamy* (*Kartikeya*) respectively.

However, all Hindus are united because all believe in the uniqueness of the all-pervading, all powerful supreme entity (*Ishwara /Devathey/Devadu/Devthai/Kadavul/Iraivan*) who is the cause of all causes.

Seventh chapter, hymn number twenty of *Bhagavad Gita* says clearly that one obtains fruit by praying to *Ishwara*, but those who have lost their reasoning power and being of ignorant nature, worship deities, i.e. idols of *Devatas*:

कामैस्तैस्तैर्हतज्ञानाः प्रपद्यन्तेऽन्यदेवताः ।
तं तं नियममास्थाय प्रकृत्या नियताः स्वया ॥
kāmais tais tair hatajñānāḥ prapadyante'nya devatāḥ
tam tam niyamamāsthāya prakṛityā niyatāḥ svayā

Those whose wisdom has been carried away by various desires, being prompted by their own nature, worship other deities besides *Ishwara* adopting rules relating to each.