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Deity Worship and the Manifestation of Divinity

To devotees of other religions, Hinduism often appears to be a strange, polytheistic following, filled with arcane rituals specific to each deity. Especially to someone coming from a Western theistic background, understanding one of Hinduism's core concepts—the Manifestation of Divinity in Deity Worship—is difficult. Yet there exists a very logical basis, and even a striking resemblance to the concept of atomic structure, something anyone who has taken a chemistry class can relate to.

Those of other faiths typically only have a few encounters with Hindu philosophy, possibly visiting a mandir or seeing murtis in someone's home. They will ask why Hindus seem to worship so many gods, and will be told how there is only one god but different forms. Yet they will most likely not understand. This prompts the question:

Why do Hindus pray to deities? Isn't the worshipping of such "idols" an outdated idea from thousands of years ago?

The truth is, Hindus do not worship mere idols. Idols are simply stone statues. We pray to deities, manifestations of a single Divine Being in forms that our human minds can comprehend. The need for this is demonstrated in the Bhagavad-Gita. Arjun asks Krishna to show himself in his true form. The Gita says, "If hundreds of thousands of suns rose up at once into the sky, they might resemble the effulgence of the Supreme Person in that universal form." Robert J. Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb, quoted that verse after seeing his creation detonated for the first time.

These two examples illustrate the true nature of Bhagwanji. In reality, the God of Hinduism is a formless, boundless flowing mass of pure spiritual energy, more powerful than any weapon mankind can dream of, who constitutes everything.

This state is indescribable, a form known as Nirguna. As Krishna says in the Gita: "The universe is pervaded and sustained by an infinitesimal fraction of me." Hindu philosophy says that this ethereal matter is in every single thing in the universe; in fact, it is the universe and more.

Further acceptance that Divinity exists in all people is built into one of the very words we use everyday: "Namaste." Today, most greet each other using it in a casual sense, but it possesses a far deeper meaning than just "hello." When joining one's palms and bowing, the total expression means "The light within me bows to the light within you." What is Divinity if not the truest light in the universe? In its most accurate sense, "Namaste" is the acknowledgement that one atman is derived from the same Divinity as the next.

The famed Sanskrit phrases "Aham Brahmasmi" and "Tat Tvam Asi" also help reinforce this point. The former means "I am Brahman," referring to one's atman. It asserts that the atman in a person is really a part of God himself. The second statement translates to "you are that" (referring to Brahman). It recognizes that every single person has an atman, and therefore we are all part of God. Together these statements convey the idea that everyone in the universe is the same, all containing a soul formed from drops of the same ocean of spiritual matter that is the Divine.

But, there is one problem with God in his formless state. Humans, with our fickle minds, can't comprehend His Nirguna state. Something incomprehensible inherently becomes difficult to worship. And if we cannot worship and learn, then we cannot hope to grow closer to God, remove ourselves from ignorance, and achieve moksha.

God knows this, and here is where some of the best the logic of our religion resides. Since we cannot understand Him in Nirguna, He allows us to direct our thoughts and devotion toward another form of him: Deities. We can visualize him in a form more like ourselves. Logically this means we can much better relate to, and therefore learn from, the Divine.

So, what are deities when Hindus believe God is in everyone and everything? They are the form of Bhagwanji we love that live in our mandirs and homes, called

Saguna, localized *manifestations* of the Divine in forms that humans can project qualities onto and understand.

The concepts of Nirguna, Saguna, and deities possess a very interesting correlation with the Atomic Theory. Imagine if one could see every single atom. It would be overwhelming. One's entire field of vision would be filled with countless atoms, and one would find it impossible to make sense of anything. But thankfully, the atoms manifest themselves into elements, elements into compounds, and compounds into the organic and inorganic matter that make up our everyday world. These are things that the human mind can easily perceive, and therefore have meaning.

Similarly, the Divinity Hindus call "God" manifests itself into deities we can understand. In the end, science tells us that we are all really just complex chains of carbon molecules, bound together by invisible forces. Just as there is really only the atom organizing itself into more discernable forms, Sanatan Dharma recognizes there is really only the Divine, manifesting itself into deities discernable to humans. Does this not perfectly amount to "One God, but many forms," the phrase we use to describe our religion to others? The logic behind deity worship and the Manifestation of Divinity is quite sound; indeed, Hinduism has rationale similar to the widely accepted Atomic Theory. When we worship our Hindu deities, we come closer our true selves, and a God as eternal as the atom itself.

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