



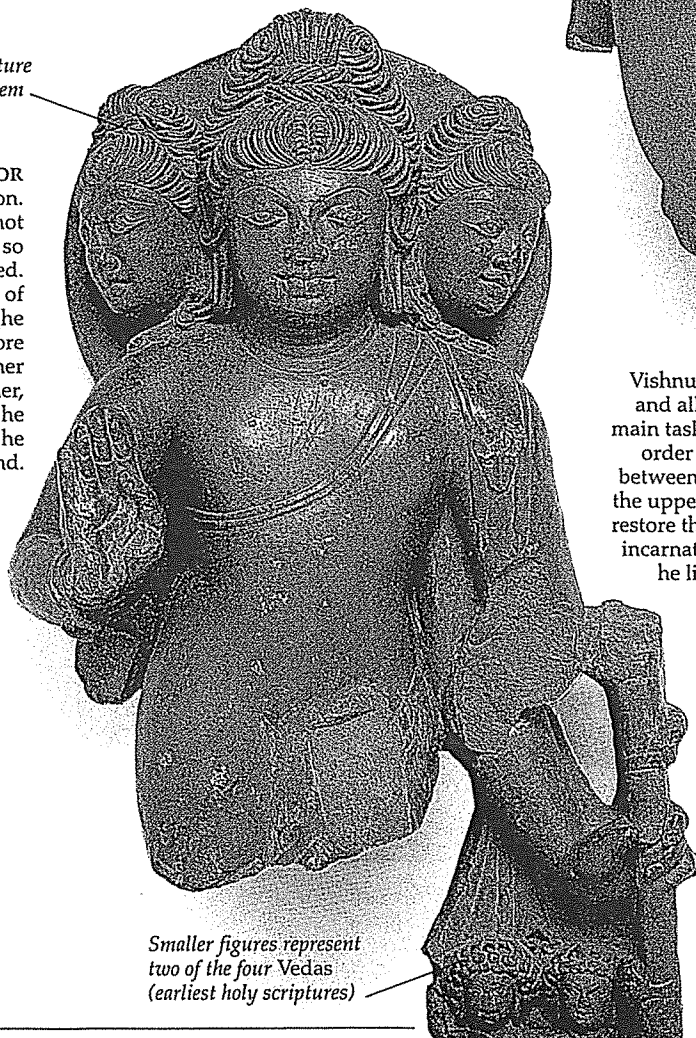
The Hindu way

SACRED SOUND
Om or Aum is the eternal syllable. It is said or sung before and after all prayers.

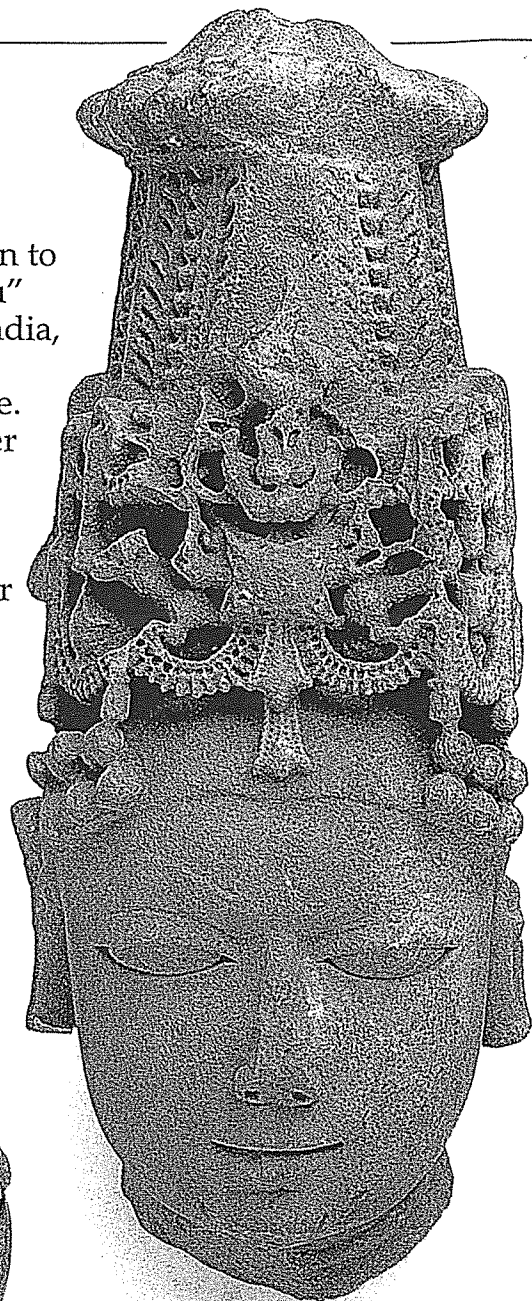
TO BE A HINDU is to be born a Hindu and then to follow a certain way of life. The word "Hindu" comes from Hind, the old Persian word for India, and Hinduism simply means the religion of the peoples of India. With no founder and no creed, it has evolved over time. As we know it today, it can be compared to a great, deep river into which, over a period of more than 3,000 years, many streams have flowed. The streams are the beliefs and practices of the numerous races, ethnic groups, and cultures of the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism has many gods, yet, for some Hindus, there is an impersonal "Absolute" behind them all, called Brahman, creator of the universe. Brahman "unfolds" into the Trimurti, the holy trinity made up of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Brahma is the creator; Vishnu, the great preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer but also the re-creator. Hindus everywhere believe in reincarnation, that the individual soul is born again in another body and that life flows on through many existences, from birth through death to rebirth. If people are good in one life, they will be rewarded by being well born in their next life.

Brahma has four heads; this sculpture shows three of them

BRAHMA THE CREATOR
Brahma's exclusive purpose is creation. Unlike Vishnu and Shiva, he does not contain opposites within himself, and so he never destroys what he has created. According to one tradition, he arose out of the "egg of the universe." Originally he had only one head. He acquired three more when he created woman. After cutting her from his own body he fell in love with her, but she hid herself from him. So that he could always see her from every side, he grew heads to the right, left, and behind.



Smaller figures represent two of the four Vedas (earliest holy scriptures)



VISHNU THE PRESERVER
Vishnu contains and balances good and evil, and all other opposites, within himself. His main task, as preserver, is to maintain the divine order of the universe, keeping the balance between good and evil powers. When evil gets the upper hand, Vishnu comes down to Earth to restore the balance, taking the form of one of ten incarnations called avatars - beings in whom he lives throughout their lives. Two of the best known avatars are Krishna and Rama. Vishnu is often called "the infinite ocean of the universe."

Hinduism is more a way of life than a set of beliefs.

SARVEPALLI RADHAKRISHNAN,
FORMER PRESIDENT OF INDIA

HINDUISM
GODS? Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva, Sarasvati, Kali, and many others
THE AFTERLIFE? Reincarnation
SCRIPTURES? Vedas, Upanishads, and others
MAJOR FESTIVALS? Diwali - New year Festival of Lights Holi - Spring festival Janmastami - Birthday of Krishna Shivaratri - Main festival of Shiva
SACRED ANIMAL? Cow is the symbol of Earth

The flaming halo around Shiva symbolizes the cosmos

Shiva's whirling hair holds flowers, snakes, a skull, and a small figure of the goddess Ganga (the sacred river Ganges)

As Shiva beats the drum, he summons up a new creation

Shiva's vertical third eye gives light to the world

The flame is a symbol of the fire with which Shiva destroys the universe

This hand points to the left foot, beneath which the worshiper can find safe refuge

SHIVA AS "LORD OF THE DANCE"
Shiva is both destroyer and re-creator. He is depicted in many forms. As Nataraja, Lord of the Dance (the form shown here), he brings the dance or cycle of life to an end in order that a new cycle of life may begin. This statue illustrates a legend in which he subdued 10,000 heretics (nonbelievers) by dancing on the demon of ignorance.

Left foot is a symbol of liberation

Apasmarapurusa, the Black Dwarf, demon of ignorance

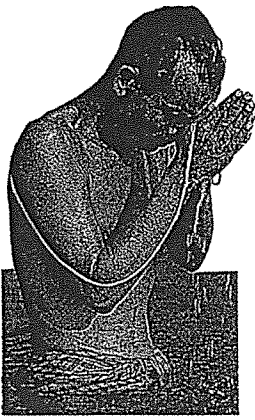
Shiva dances in a ring of flames

Shiva is adored by two sages (wise men); the one on his right has the lower body of a snake, the one on his left has tiger legs

This sage has the legs of a tiger

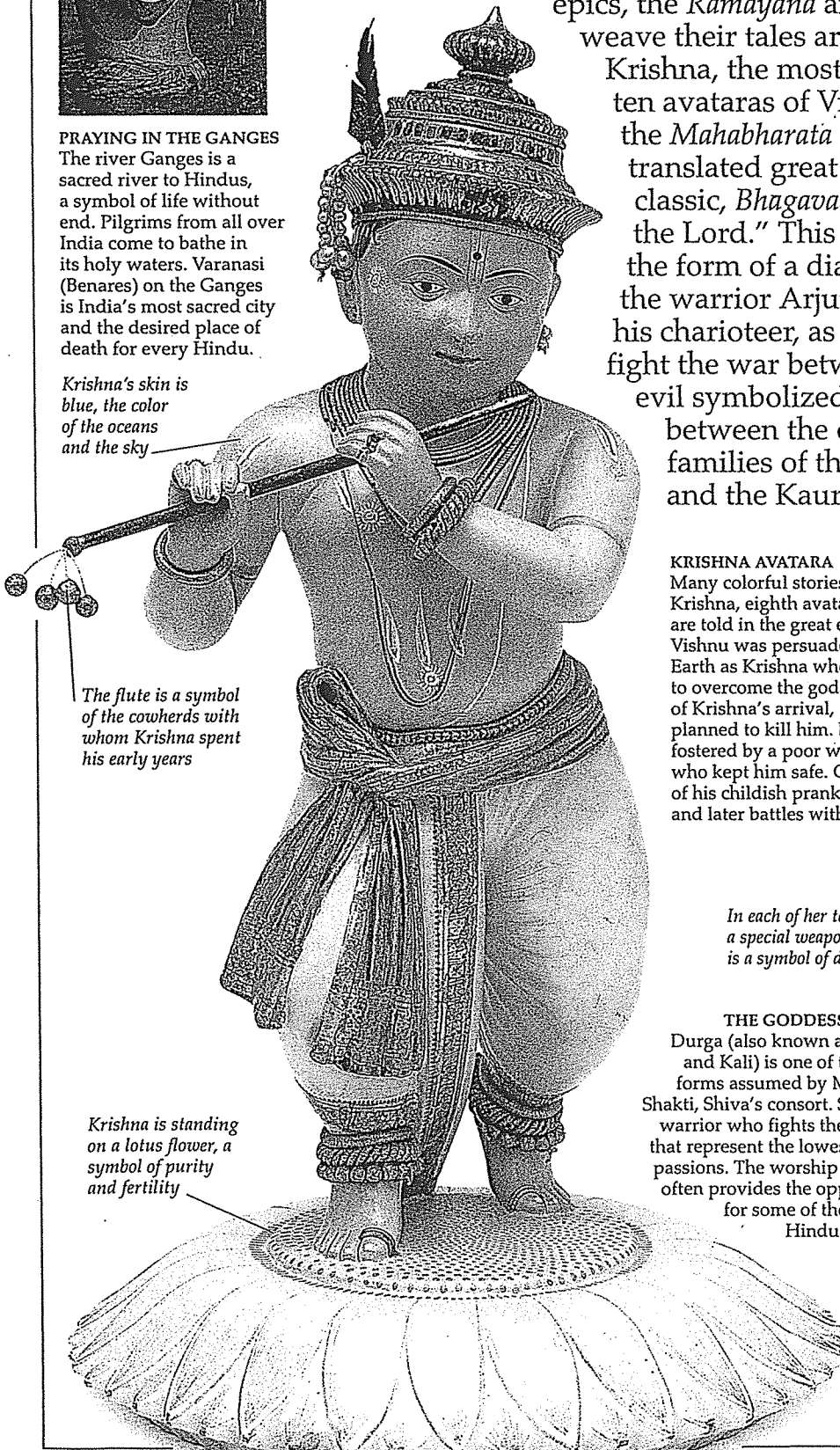
Flowers, symbols of purity, and rebirth, are used to decorate temples and statues

Gods and heroes



PRAYING IN THE GANGES
The river Ganges is a sacred river to Hindus, a symbol of life without end. Pilgrims from all over India come to bathe in its holy waters. Varanasi (Benares) on the Ganges is India's most sacred city and the desired place of death for every Hindu.

Krishna's skin is blue, the color of the oceans and the sky



The flute is a symbol of the cowherds with whom Krishna spent his early years

Krishna is standing on a lotus flower, a symbol of purity and fertility

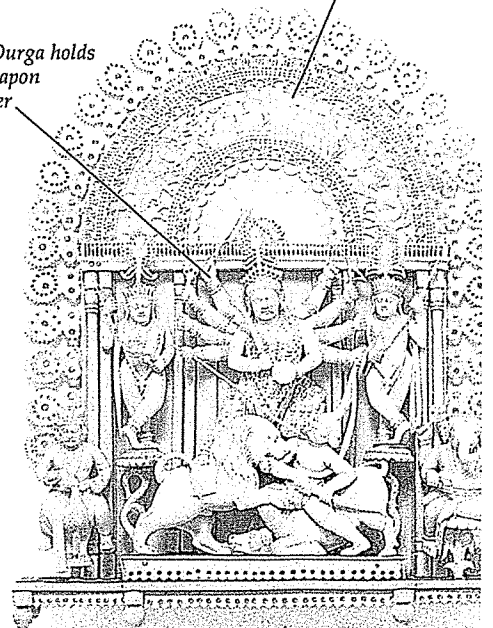
THE HINDU SCRIPTURES are full of the adventures of numerous gods and heroes. The *Vedas* tell of Agni the god of fire and sacrifice, Indra the sky god of war, and Varuna the god of cosmic order. The two great Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, weave their tales around Rama and Krishna, the most popular of the ten avatars of Vishnu. Within the *Mahabharata* is the frequently translated great Indian spiritual classic, *Bhagavad Gita*, "Song of the Lord." This poem takes the form of a dialogue between the warrior Arjuna and Krishna, his charioteer, as together they fight the war between good and evil symbolized in the battle between the closely related families of the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

KRISHNA AVATARA

Many colorful stories are woven around Krishna, eighth avatara of Vishnu. They are told in the great epic, the *Mahabharata*. Vishnu was persuaded to come down to Earth as Krishna when demons were about to overcome the gods. On hearing the news of Krishna's arrival, the demon-king Kansa planned to kill him. But Krishna was fostered by a poor woman called Yashoda, who kept him safe. Countless tales are told of his childish pranks, youthful adventures, and later battles with the demons.

THE GODDESS DURGA
Durga (also known as Parvati and Kali) is one of the many forms assumed by Mahadevi Shakti, Shiva's consort. She is the warrior who fights the demons that represent the lowest human passions. The worship of Durga often provides the opportunity for some of the greatest Hindu festivals.

In each of her ten hands Durga holds a special weapon; each weapon is a symbol of divine power



In this ivory image Durga kills the buffalo demon Mahisha



Matsya, the fish and first avatara, warned humanity of a great flood

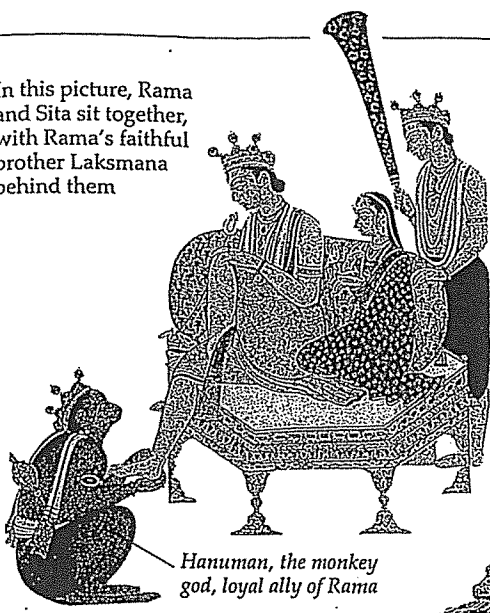


Narasimha, the man-lion and fourth avatara, defeated demons



Kalki, the tenth avatara, is still to come

In this picture, Rama and Sita sit together, with Rama's faithful brother Laksmana behind them

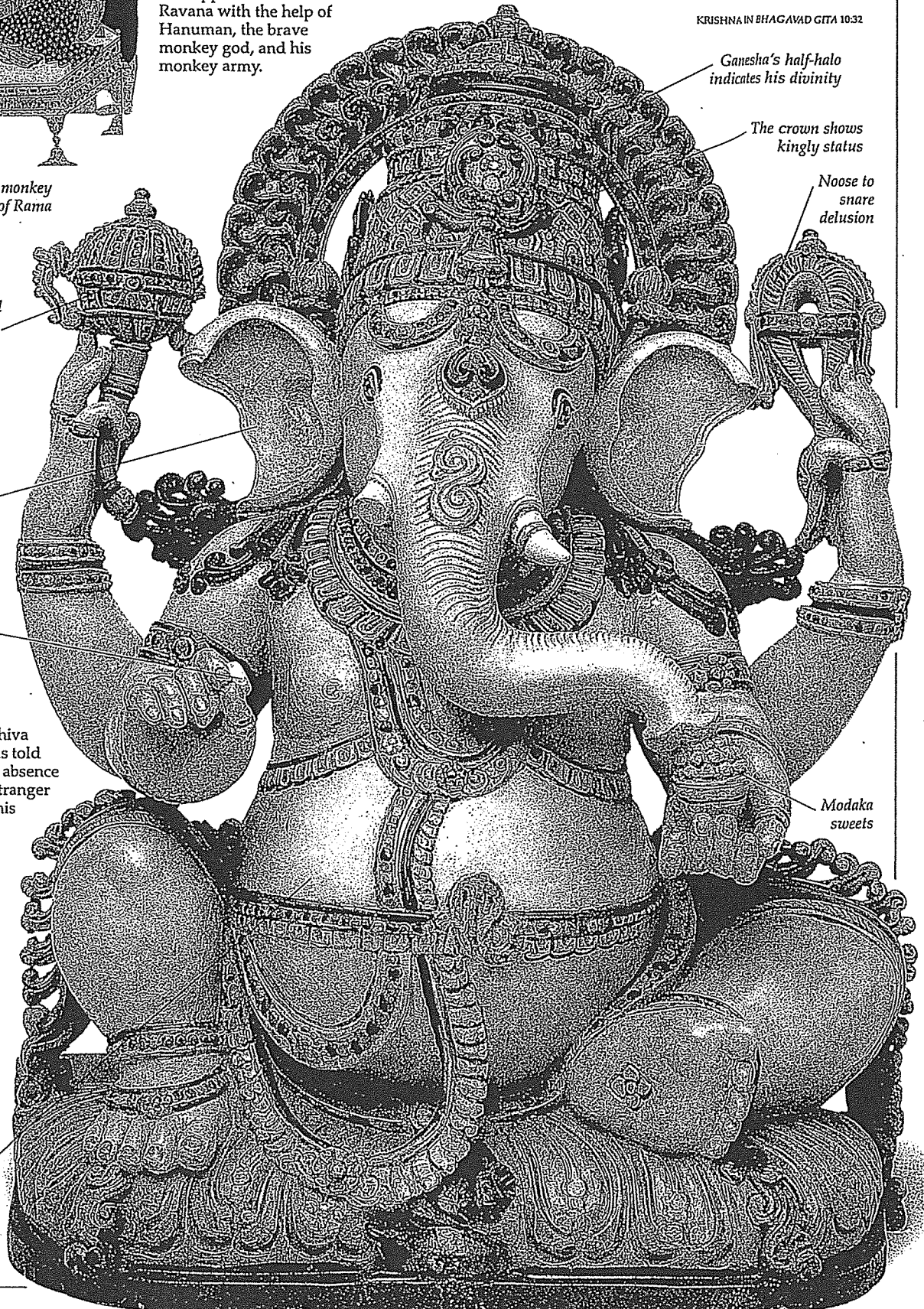


Hanuman, the monkey god, loyal ally of Rama

RAMA AVATARA
 Rama, seventh avatara of Vishnu, is the embodiment of goodness come down to Earth. He and his wife, Sita, are models of loving husband and faithful wife. He is respected as the virtuous god-king who overthrew the wicked demon Ravana. First, he and Sita were banished, then Ravana kidnapped Sita. But Rama defeated Ravana with the help of Hanuman, the brave monkey god, and his monkey army.

I am the beginning and the middle and the end of all that is. Of all knowledge I am the knowledge of the Soul.

KRISHNA IN BHAGAVAD GITA 10:32



Ganesha's half-halo indicates his divinity

The crown shows kingly status

Noose to snare delusion

This decorated goad (pointed stick) represents self-control

The large flapping ears separate the essential from the nonessential

Ganesha writes with a piece of his broken tusk after his steel pen snapped

Modaka sweets

GANESHA
 Ganesha is the first-born son of Shiva and his beautiful wife Parvati. It is told how Shiva, returning after a long absence to his heavenly dwelling, saw a stranger at his door and promptly cut off his head. Parvati appeared, only to find that the victim was their own son. Desperate to make amends, Shiva cut off the head of a passing elephant and placed it on his son's shoulders. From that day on, Ganesha has had an elephant's head. He is the god of wisdom and the remover of obstacles. In their prayers, Hindus ask him to take note of their requests and convey them to Shiva.

Ganesha's great belly represents space, big enough to hold all wisdom and life



HOLY MAN

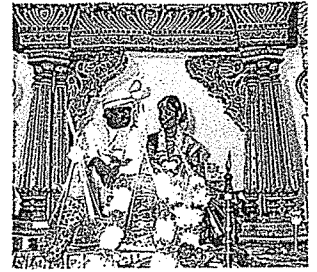
A sadhu is a wandering holy man. He has no possessions apart from his robes and a few utensils.

Three ways to salvation

HINDUS WISH TO ACHIEVE SALVATION, or moksha, by release from the cycle of rebirth. Lightening the load of bad karma – guilt acquired through wrong living – leads toward the final release. There are three basic ways of achieving salvation. The way of action involves performing correct religious observances, in the hope of being blessed by the divine for fulfilling these duties. The way of knowledge seeks to understand and experience

the ultimate meaning of life through reason and meditation, as sadhus do. The way of devotion (the most popular way) seeks to be united with the divine through the worship of a particular deity.

Traditionally, Hindus are born into one of four castes (social classes), or are “untouchables” (outcastes – the lowest rank). Religious duties vary with caste.



WEDDING

Hindu families go to great expense to provide a wedding ceremony for their children. Marriages are arranged according to caste, kinship, and horoscope. The wedding ceremony contains many highly symbolic elements, and the institution of marriage is highly valued.

Pinnacles represent a mountain, symbolizing upward hopes and ambitions

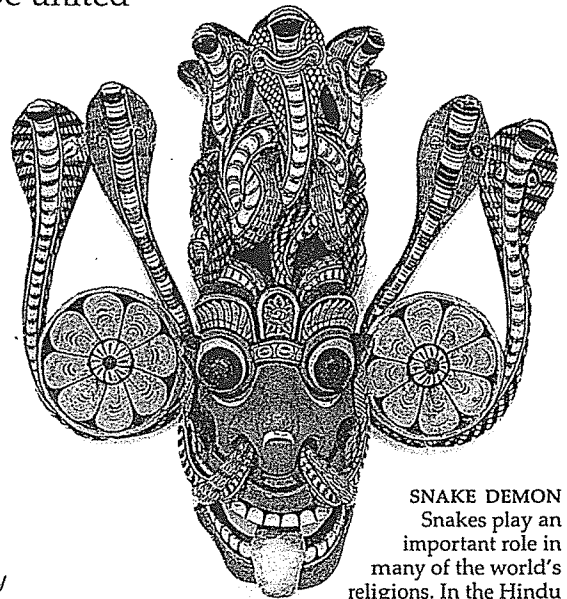
Temples are considered to be earthly dwelling places of the gods

MANDIR

A Hindu temple is called a mandir. The building itself represents Prakriti (the nature of the universe), and the deity within is the Purusha (the Divine Being). On entering a mandir, Hindus remove their footwear. This is because a mandir is not only a place of worship but is itself an object of worship. Its every part is sacred and holy.

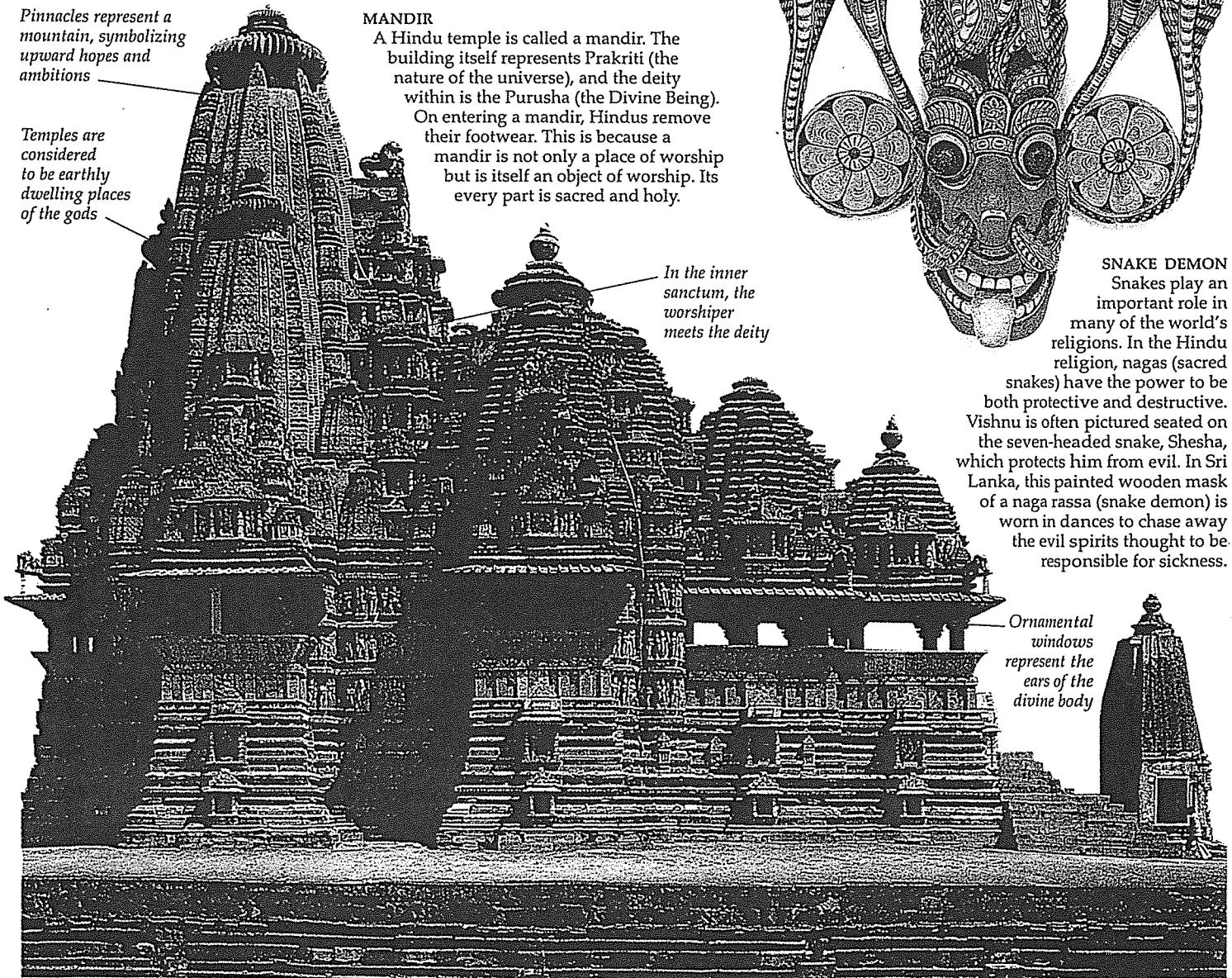
In the inner sanctum, the worshiper meets the deity

Ornamental windows represent the ears of the divine body



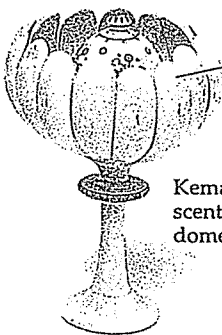
SNAKE DEMON

Snakes play an important role in many of the world's religions. In the Hindu religion, nagas (sacred snakes) have the power to be both protective and destructive. Vishnu is often pictured seated on the seven-headed snake, Shesha, which protects him from evil. In Sri Lanka, this painted wooden mask of a naga rassa (snake demon) is worn in dances to chase away the evil spirits thought to be responsible for sickness.



INCARNATION

The idea that God or the gods can appear in bodily form, usually human, is found in many religions. In Hinduism, Vishnu comes down to Earth a number of times in different forms known as avatars. In Christianity, God makes Himself manifest in Jesus Christ.



The lotus, a symbol of purity, fertility, and creation, is linked with Vishnu

Kemal (lotus-shaped scent shaker) used in domestic worship

Incense holder

INCENSE

Incense is made from a number of woods and resins that, when heated or burned, give off a fragrant aroma. The use of incense in divine worship is an ancient and widespread practice. It is associated with sacrifice, honor, purification, and celebration.

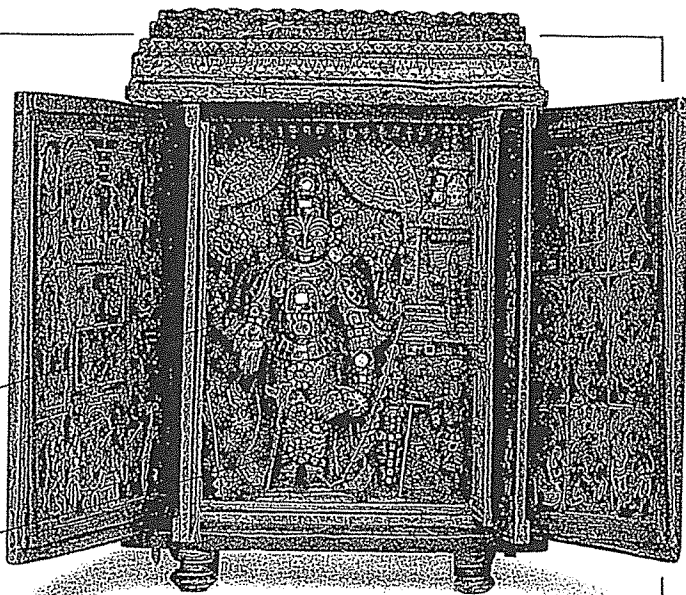
*Give me your mind
and give me your heart,
give me your offerings
and your adoration.*

KRISHNA IN BHAGAVAD GITA 9.34

CHARIOT AND CHARIOTEER

In the *Bhagavad Gita* there is a dialogue between the god Krishna and the archer Arjuna on a battlefield. The battle is the war between good and evil, action and inaction, knowledge and ignorance, belief and disbelief. Krishna urges Arjuna to action and promises to be his charioteer. Vivekananda, a modern reformer and philosopher, interpreted their relationship: The body is the chariot; the outer senses are the horses; the mind the reins; and the intellect the charioteer. So man crosses the ocean of maya (illusion). He goes beyond and reaches God. When a man is under the control of his senses, he is of this world. When he has controlled the senses, he has renounced the world.

This picture shows a famous scene from the *Bhagavad Gita*

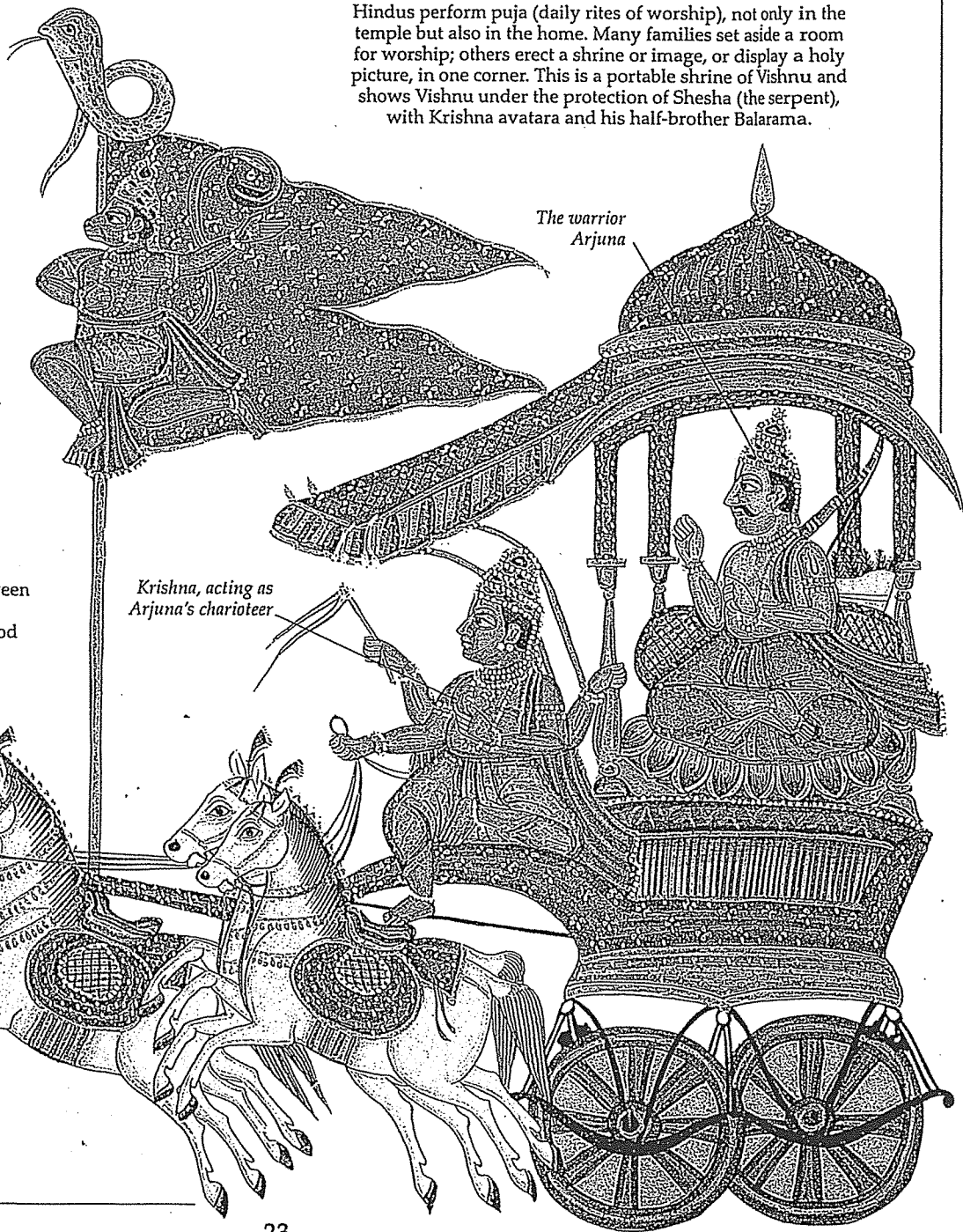


Main image of Vishnu

Krishna and Balarama

DAILY WORSHIP

Hindus perform puja (daily rites of worship), not only in the temple but also in the home. Many families set aside a room for worship; others erect a shrine or image, or display a holy picture, in one corner. This is a portable shrine of Vishnu and shows Vishnu under the protection of Shesha (the serpent), with Krishna avatara and his half-brother Balarama.



The warrior Arjuna

Krishna, acting as Arjuna's charioteer