

# HINDU PANTHEON

Early Vedic gods, like the gods of the Greek or Celtic pantheon, represent natural forces. In the Rig Veda, the oldest Vedic religious text, thirty-three deities are mentioned, eleven gods of the sky, eleven gods of the earth and eleven gods of water. Several of them (Indra, Varuna, Vishnu) are said to have created the universe, set the sun in the sky, and to have propped apart heaven and earth. Some major gods were clearly personifications of natural phenomena, and these deities had no clearly delineated divine personalities.

AGNI was the fire-god, who was observed in all his multifarious manifestations: in the sacrificial fire, in lightning, or hidden in the logs from which fire can be drilled. As the fire of sacrifice, Agni is the mediator between the human and the divine orders. Agni is above all the good friend of the Aryans and is prayed to in order to strike down and burn one's enemies and to mediate between the gods and men.

ASHVINS (literally horsemen gods) were twin benevolent gods who helped and healed the needy.

DYSAUS was the god of the sky.

ERTHIVI was the goddess Mother-Earth, wife of Dyaus. Together Dyaus and Ethivi were the primal deities, parents of several gods and goddesses such as Usas, Indra, Agni and Surya.

INDRA was the god of war and rain storms, who at the dawn of time destroys the dragon Vritra with his thunderbolt. His weapons are lightning and the thunderbolt.

MITRA was the god of friendship and harmony, who establishes laws for humankind and ensures the well-being of society.

SOMA was the god who personified the hallucinogenic juice soma (also called hoama), the drink of the gods. As a drink as well as a god, Soma confers great strength, wisdom, and immortality. Soma also provides some form of union between the priest and the god.

PRAJPATI was the god of creation.

RUDRA was a god with an ambivalent and unpredictable nature. In the Vedas Rudra he is known as the divine archer, who shoots arrows of death and disease and who has to be implored not to slay or injure in his wrath. But Rudra is also a healer who knows many remedies and therefore he has also a benevolent aspect. He is also the father of the storm gods.

SURYA was the sun god. Seven horses, representing the seven days of the week led his golden chariot.

USAS (literally "the dawn") was the goddess who brings in the day and thus is said to bring forth the Sun.

VARUNA was the god ruler of the sky realm, the guardian of cosmic order and moral law, a duty shared with the group of gods known as the Aditi.

VISHNU was the god famous for his "three strides" with which he traversed the universe, thus creating and possessing it.

