

Twelve Concepts in Indian Spirituality

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This article introduces with necessary philosophical basis, the perception of “Dwaadasha Tattva” or twelve concepts, enshrining twelve key deities of Indian Spirituality. These are Lalitha Ambika (Parabrahman), Dharma Shasta (Guru), Shiva (Existence), Shakti (Attributes), Maayon (Narayana), Skanda (Guruguha), Vinaayaka (Pranava), Durga (Kriya Shakti), Lakshmi (Iccha Shakti), Saraswathi (Jnaana Shakti), Brahma (Creator), Aaditya (Universe), Aanjaneya (Bhakti).

Indian Spirituality is known for its vastness and profoundness, witnessed in the sheer number of followers, diversity of customs and festivities, the huge amount of literature and treatises, grandeur and profusion of temples and finally the sheer number of deities invoked. Consolidation is thus a key element of this tradition.

The famed jewel of Indian Spirituality, Aadi Shankara adopted the age-old system of Panchaayatana Pooja and gave the world the treasure-trove that is Shanmatha. While an invaluable gem for the spiritual beginner, a more extensive understanding of Indian Spirituality is needed for a complete perspective, from the view of Sri Vidya.

For this reason, here is introducing the concept of "Dwaadasha Tattva" or concepts commonly visualized as 12 key deities in Hinduism, retaining the core essence of Shanmatha. We must note here that the 'deities' are abstract concepts, transcendent of space (they are universal) and time (they have existence in past, present and future). Thus, as much as this collection depicts the stages during the original creation or the ultimate destruction, this exact same collection also shows the mechanism of the universe, this very moment. These deities are all to be viewed as different names or forms of the one Absolute, without any distinction of superior or inferior. For this reason, one must look at aspects of Spirituality dating back to an age far before the intellectual degradation and the assault of petty egotism that drives people mad claiming superiority of Shaivism, Vaishnavism etc, without understanding even the extent of philosophical depth in Indian Spirituality. Even during Aadi Shankara's times, such nefarious squabbles were prevalent. So ultimately, we are pushed to the ancient Sangam and Vedic ages to seek some sensible, valid points for understanding the Dwaadasha Tattva.



The basic premise is the premise of Advaita, ie. the body, mind, world and everything understood by the five senses, thoughts, feelings and memories is unreal, figments of the mind and is the delusion called Maaya, revolving around a false sense of identification with the finite body and mind, also called Ego or Ahankaara. Transcending this Maaya, one kills the Ahankaara and the unreal 'world' to reveal the true Self (Atman), which is infinite, eternal truth (Sat), fundamental consciousness (Chit) and pure unalloyed bliss (Aanandam). This Self is very much the Absolute, Parabrahman, which gives rise to the entire universe through its 'playful act' of Maaya, and thus as the playful source, is called 'Lalitha Ambika', the Universal Mother. Because the Mother is beyond form, descriptions and intellectual comprehension, She is termed 'Nirguna'.

Lalitha Ambika is nothing but the Aanandam or Atman itself, as the ultimate destination in all of Spirituality. This is the "**Zeroth Tattva**".



Then comes the triad of Shiva-Shakti-Maayon. Maayon, an ancient Tamil Sangam term is today better known as Narayana, and each of these three is completely non-distinct, completely inseparable and in every way equal to each other. Maayon or Narayana is the realm of Maaya, which is the fundamental canvas on which the universe is created and operates. Maayon, the

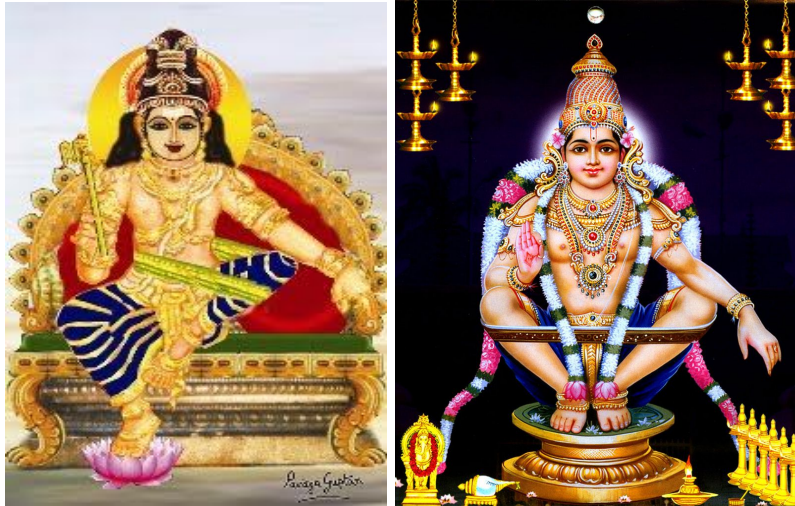
realm of Maaya, because of the virtue of assuming form is called 'Saguna'. In this realm of Maaya, comes existence of Shiva, called Prakaasha, which is nothing but pure existence, without any understanding of what its nature or features are. Shakti, called the Vimarsha is the attributes such as name, form etc of this existence. For example, is the statement "Apple is tasty" - the scope of the statement is Maayon, existence 'is' is Shiva, and the attribute 'tasty' is Shakti. Without existence and attributes, the realm of Maaya makes no sense, and without the realm of Maaya, existence and attributes do not exist. Thus, all are inseparable and interdependent of each other. Shiva is the Father Appa, Shakti the Mother Amma and Maayon the Revered Ayya.



Then comes an interesting stage, as an intermediate between Saguna and Nirguna. To do this, the vertical Saguna-Nirguna duality must assume a horizontal duality. For this, Maayon, along with Shiva and Shakti combine to form a single Saguna aspect, called 'Narayana', and this union takes the place of Shakti. This is the basis of associating Maaya, which is Maayon, as Yoga Maaya or Maha Maaya, the Goddess (Keralites often chant Amme Narayana). Nirguna on the other hand conflates taking the place of Shiva. At this point, Shiva, as Arunachala transcends form and emerges as a tall pillar of fire (The 'Formless Form' of Lingam), and is now called Shankara.

Thus, Shiva-Shakti now becomes Shankara-Narayana, the horizontal manifestation of the vertical Nirguna-Saguna. This Shankara Narayana manifests as Dharma Shaasta or Ayya-Appa (Ayyappan), which is nothing but a two-way bridge between Saguna and Nirguna. In the upward path of ascent, from Saguna to Nirguna, one sees the Shaasta (Teacher) aspect, where Dharma Shaasta is the Guru (Preceptor), enabling and guiding us towards transcending Maaya

and attaining Self-Realization. In the downward path of descent, from Nirguna to Saguna, one sees the Dharma (Righteousness) aspect (Krishna as Narayana states "Dharma Samsthaapanaarthaaya Sambhavaami Yuge Yuge"). Dharma Shaasta thus upholds righteousness, gracing the devout, encouraging discipline and austerity, punishing the wicked and destroying the evil elements and spirits, protecting the people.



Exaggeration of the Shaasta aspect gives rise to the Dakshinamurthi form, seen in temples, whereas exaggeration of Dharma aspect gives rise to Ayyanar form, seen as a protector village God. The true form of Ayyappa with both aspects is seen in very few temples where Sri Vidya is predominant (Kanchipuram, Tiruvarur, Papanasam, Sori Muthaiyan Koil, Sabarimala). In Sabarimala, the practice of Irumudi and associated austerities followed for taking the sacred Yatra is a reflection of the Dharma aspect, while the golden words "Tat Tvam Asi" (That Thou Art), one of the four great Truths (Maha Vakyas) is written on the entrance to the sanctum sanctorum, signifying Ayyappa's prime teaching as the Guru or Shaasta aspect.



Thus, Dharma Shaasta, in between Nirguna and Saguna stages is the "**First Tattva**", while Shiva, Shakti and Maayon are "**Second, Third and Fourth Tattvas**".

Combining the realm of Maayon, and Shiva and Shakti yields what is called the Kaamakalaa - Localized within Saguna level, this has aspects of Maayon, Shiva and Shakti as local Reality (Maaya), local existence (Ahankaara) and local identity (Naama Roopa). This Kaamakalaa is the primordial localized wisdom or awareness (Jnaana) and takes on two forms. Looking inwards, this is static, and represents the first case of matter. It is thus called the seed Bindu, or Skanda - as the pure embodiment of Jnaana directed towards the Atman (Guru Guha). Turned outwards, this is the first case of energy, and is the primordial vibration, or Naada, known as Vinaayaka or Ganesha. This inward and outward perception together gives the first and primordial wave, better known as Aum, or Pranava or Omkaara. Both are inward and outward aspects of Kaamakalaa, and thus Skanda and Vinaayaka form the **"Fifth and Sixth Tattvas"**.



From the Naada-Bindu duo, the wave Aum develops three flavors, called three Gunas. These are represented by three 'Shakti Devis'. The first, is the power of Will or Iccha Shakti, seen as Goddess Lakshmi. Better known to physics as potential energy, this represents the built up urge and impetus to perform any given action. Within the realm of expansion, it is this Lakshmi, also called Narayani or Vaishnavi that transforms into Bhuvaneshwari, with the full expanse of the universe forming Her very own body. Thus, the concept of 'space' is born.

The second Shakti Devi is Work or Kriya Shakti, seen as Goddess Durga. Sporting weapons of all deities, She is to be understood wherever some action or work is done. Known in physics as Kinetic Energy, work is essentially to bring about changes in the state of a system, also known by the concept of entropy. Due to such changes, we understand something as an initial or final

state, and thus the concept of 'time' is born as a marker of the state change. Thus, Durga transforms into Kaali, represented as dark and embodiment of death and destruction, since work done is always at the expense of energy, leading to decrease in energy level.

The last Shakti Devi is Wisdom or Jnaana Shakti, seen as Goddess Saraswathi. Known in physics as information energy, or state space, the Goddess represents the complete yet highly localized state of awareness and information of an entity with respect to its surroundings and energy states.



These three deities - Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswathi are all transcendent of the Gunas, yet rule over the three Gunas of Taamasa, Raajasa and Sattva respectively due to the tendency to expend, increase or consolidate the energy level. These deities form the "**Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Tattvas**".

With the three flavors of Iccha, Jnaana and Kriya, this Aum now spreads, permeating and pervading the entire universe, within the bounds of space and time. These coordinate systems of space and time, containing the Aum, is seen as the deity Brahma, which is the creator God. This is the "**Tenth Tattva**".

Within the coordinates of Brahma, the universe starts to materialize. The infiniteness of the coordinates is translated as not (A) finite (Diti) - Aditi, and thus, the universe born out of Aditi is called Aaditya. Among all aspects of the manifest universe, life is seen as the most precious and most valuable, and thus Aaditya is associated with life itself (Jeeva). Locally, for the planet

earth, the sun Soorya is the ultimate source of all life, and is thus seen as equivalent with Aaditya. Thus, the deity Aaditya forms the "**Eleventh Tattva**".



Finally, within the manifest universe, and even within earth, as the living embodiment of all the previous 11 Tattvas, we find the deity Hanuman. The Lord is a Shiva-Shakti incarnation, attained Narayana through Bhakti, is the embodiment of wisdom (Buddhir Balam) as Vinaayaka and Skanda, and represents the triple Shaktis as Knowledge-Wealth-Valour (Kalvi, Selvam, Veeram). As the Shishya (disciple) of Aaditya, the Lord is Guru Himself (Dharma Shasta), and embodies the concept of life itself, living to eternity without death as a Chiranjeevi. Combining all these aspects, the Lord Hanuman, as an embodiment of Nirguna Lalitha Ambika Herself stands as an epitome of Bhakti, or divine love, or devotion, which is the one and only thing a person on earth needs to start the upward journey towards Self-Realization. Thus, Hanuman is the last and "**Twelfth Tattva**".



Thus, these 12 Tattvas, are seen without hierarchical limitations of superior-inferior as manifestations of Lalitha Ambika in various fundamental aspects of the creation, destruction and

operation of the universe, and are the key 12 deities to be worshipped and contemplated both while and after journeying towards Self-Realization or Moksha.



[Om Sri Sai Venkateshaya Namah]