

= Ardhanarishvara =

Ardhanarishvara (Sanskrit : अर्धनारीश्वर , Ardhanārīśvara) is a composite androgynous form of the Hindu god Shiva and his consort Parvati (also known as Devi , Shakti and Uma in this icon) . Ardhanarishvara is depicted as half male and half female , split down the middle . The right half is usually the male Shiva , illustrating his traditional attributes .

The earliest Ardhanarishvara images are dated to the Kushan period , starting from the first century CE . Its iconography evolved and was perfected in the Gupta era . The Puranas and various iconographic treatises write about the mythology and iconography of Ardhanarishvara . While Ardhanarishvara remains a popular iconographic form found in most Shiva temples throughout India , very few temples are dedicated to this deity .

Ardhanarishvara represents the synthesis of masculine and feminine energies of the universe (Purusha and Prakriti) and illustrates how Shakti , the female principle of God , is inseparable from (or the same as , according to some interpretations) Shiva , the male principle of God . The union of these principles is exalted as the root and womb of all creation . Another view is that Ardhanarishvara is a symbol of Shiva 's all @-@ pervasive nature .

= = Names = =

The name Ardhanarishvara means " the Lord who is half woman . " Ardhanarishvara is also known by other names like Ardhanaranari (" the half man @-@ woman ") , Ardhanarisha (" the Lord who is half woman ") , Ardhanarinateshvara (" the Lord of Dance who is half @-@ woman ") , Parangada , Naranari (" man @-@ woman ") , Ammiappan (a Tamil name meaning " Mother @-@ Father ") , and Ardhayuvatishvara (in Assam , " the Lord whose half is a young woman or girl ") . The Gupta @-@ era writer Pushpadanta in his Mahimnastava refers to this form as dehardhaghatana (" Thou and She art each the half of one body ") . Utpala , commenting on the Brihat Samhita , calls this form Ardha @-@ gaurishvara (" the Lord whose half is the fair one " ; the fair one ? Gauri ? is an attribute of Parvati) . The Vishnudharmottara Purana simply calls this form Gaurishvara (" The Lord / husband of Gauri) .

= = Origins and early images = =

The conception of Ardhanarishvara may have been inspired by Vedic literature 's composite figure of Yama @-@ Yami , the Vedic descriptions of the primordial Creator Vishvarupa or Prajapati and the fire @-@ god Agni as " bull who is also a cow , " the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 's Atman (" soul ") in the form of the androgynous cosmic man Purusha and the androgynous myths of the Greek Hermaphroditus and Phrygian Agdistis . The Brihadaranyaka Upanishad says that Purusha splits himself into two parts , male and female , and the two halves copulate , producing all life ? a theme concurrent in Ardhanarishvara 's tales . The Shvetashvatara Upanishad sows the seed of the Puranic Ardhanarishvara . It declares Rudra ? the antecedent of the Puranic Shiva ? the maker of all and the root of Purusha (the male principle) and Prakriti (the female principle) , adhering to Samkhya philosophy . It hints at his androgynous nature , describing him both as male and female .

The concept of Ardhanarishvara originated in Kushan and Greek cultures simultaneously ; the iconography evolved in the Kushan era (30 ? 375 CE) , but was perfected in the Gupta era (320 @-@ 600 CE) . A mid @-@ first century Kushan era stela in the Mathura Museum has a half @-@ male , half @-@ female image , along with three other figures identified with Vishnu , Gaja Lakshmi and Kubera . The male half is ithyphallic or with an urdhvalinga and makes an abhaya mudra gesture ; the female left half holds a mirror and has a rounded breast . This is the earliest representation of Ardhanarishvara , universally recognized . An early Kushan Ardhanarishvara head discovered at Rajghat is displayed at the Mathura Museum . The right male half has matted hair with a skull and crescent moon ; the left female half has well @-@ combed hair decorated with flowers and wears a patra @-@ kundala (earring) . The face has a common third eye . A terracotta seal discovered in Vaishali has half @-@ man , half @-@ woman features . Early Kushan images show

Ardhanarishvara in a simple two @-@ armed form , but later texts and sculptures depict a more complex iconography .

Ardhanarishvara is referred to by the Greek author Stobaeus (c . 500 AD) while quoting Bardasanes (c . 154 ? 222 AD) , who learnt from an Indian embassy 's visit to Syria during the reign of Elagabalus (Antoninus of Emesa) (218 ? 22 AD) . A terracotta androgynous bust , excavated at Taxila and dated to the Saka @-@ Parthian era , pictures a bearded man with female breasts .

Ardhanarishvara is interpreted as an attempt to syncretise the two principal Hindu sects , Shaivism and Shaktism , dedicated to Shiva and the Great Goddess . A similar syncretic image is Harihara , a composite form of Shiva and Vishnu , the Supreme deity of the Vaishnava sect .

= = Iconography = =

The iconographic 16th century work Shilparatna , the Matsya Purana and Agamic texts like Amshumadbhedagama , Kamikagama , Supredagama and Karanagama ? most of them of South Indian origin ? describe the iconography of Ardhanarishvara . The right superior side of the body usually is the male Shiva and the left is the female Parvati ; in rare depictions belonging to the Shaktism school , the feminine holds the dominant right side . The icon usually is prescribed to have four , three or two arms , but rarely is depicted with eight arms . In the case of three arms , the Parvati side has only one arm , suggesting a lesser role in the icon .

Male half

The male half wears a jata @-@ mukuta (a headdress formed of piled , matted hair) on his head , adorned with a crescent moon . Sometimes the jata @-@ mukuta is adorned with serpents and the river goddess Ganga flowing through the hair . The right ear wears a nakra @-@ kundala , sarpa @-@ kundala (" serpent @-@ earring ") or ordinary kundala (" earring ") . Sometimes , the male eye is depicted smaller than the female one and a half @-@ moustache is also seen . A half third eye (trinetra) is prescribed on the male side of the forehead in the canons ; a full eye may also be depicted in middle of forehead separated by both the sides or a half eye may be shown above or below Parvati 's round dot . A common elliptical halo (prabhamandala / prabhavali) may be depicted behind the head ; sometimes the shape of the halo may differ on either side .

In the four @-@ armed form , a right hand holds a parashu (axe) and another makes an abhaya mudra (gesture of reassurance) , or one of the right arms is slightly bent and rests on the head of Shiva 's bull mount , Nandi , while the other is held in the abhaya mudra gesture . Another configuration suggests that a right hand holds a trishula (trident) and another makes a varada mudra (gesture of blessing) . Another scripture prescribes that a trishula and akshamala (rosary) are held in the two right hands . In the two @-@ armed form , the right hand holds a kapala (skull cup) or gestures in a varada mudra . He may also hold a skull . In the Badami relief , the four @-@ armed Ardhanarishvara plays a veena (lute) , using a left and a right arm , while other male arm holds a parashu and the female one a lotus .

The Shiva half has a flat masculine chest , a straight vertical chest , broader shoulder , wider waist and muscular thigh . He wears a yagnopavita (sacred thread) across the chest , which is sometimes represented as a naga @-@ yagnopavita (a snake worn as a yagnopavita) or a string of pearls or gems . The yagnopavita may also divide the torso into its male and female halves . He wears ornaments characteristic of Shiva 's iconography , including serpent ornaments .

In some North Indian images , the male half may be nude and also be ithyphallic (urdhavlinga or urdhavreta : with an erect phallus) , or with a full or half phallus and one testicle . However , such imagery is never found in South Indian images ; the loins are usually covered in a garment (sometimes a dhoti) of silk or cotton , or the skin of a tiger or deer) , typically down to the knee , and held in place by a sarpa @-@ mekhala , serpent girdle or jewellery . The right leg may be somewhat bent or straight and often rests on a lotus pedestal (padma @-@ pitha) . The whole right half is described as smeared with ashes and as terrible and red @-@ coloured or gold or coral in appearance ; however , these features are rarely depicted .

Female half

The female half has karanda @-@ mukuta (a basket @-@ shaped crown) on her head or well @-@ combed knotted hair or both . The left ear wears a valika @-@ kundala (a type of earring) . A tilaka or bindu (a round red dot) adorns her forehead , matching Shiva 's third eye . The left eye is painted with black eyeliner . While the male neck is sometimes adorned with a jewelled hooded serpent , the female neck has a blue lotus matching it .

In the four @-@ armed form , one of the left arms rests on Nandi 's head , while the other is bent in kataka pose and holds a nilotpala (blue lotus) or hangs loosely at her side . In the three @-@ armed representation , the left hand holds a flower , a mirror or a parrot . In the case of two @-@ armed icons , the left hand rests on Nandi 's head , hangs loose or holds either a flower , a mirror or a parrot . The parrot may be also perched on Parvati 's wrist . Her hand (s) is / are adorned with ornaments like a keyura (anklet) or kankana (bangles) .

Parvati has a well @-@ developed , round bosom and a narrow feminine waist embellished with various haras (religious bracelets) and other ornaments , made of diamonds and other gems . She has a fuller thigh and a curvier body and hip than the male part of the icon . The torso , hip and pelvis of the female is exaggerated to emphasize the anatomical differences between the halves . Though the male private parts may be depicted , the female genitalia are never depicted and the loins are always draped . She wears a multi @-@ coloured or white silken garment down to her ankle and one or three girdles around her waist . The left half wears an anklet and her foot is painted red with henna . The left leg may be somewhat bent or straight , resting on a lotus pedestal . In contrast to the Shiva half , the Parvati half ? smeared with saffron ? is described as calm and gentle , parrot @-@ green or dark in colour . She may be draped in a sari covering her torso and legs .

Postures and vahana

The posture of Ardhanarishvara may be tribhanga ? bent in three parts : head (leaning to the left) , torso (to the right) and right leg or in the sthanamudra position (straight) , sometimes standing on a lotus pedestal , whereupon it is called samapada . Seated images of Ardhanarishvara are missing in iconographic treatises , but are still found in sculpture and painting . Though the canons often depict the Nandi bull as the common vahana (mount) of Ardhanarishvara , some depictions have Shiva 's bull vahana seated or standing near or behind his foot , while the goddess 's lion vahana is near her foot .

Eight @-@ armed form

The Parashurameshvara Temple at Bhubaneswar has a dancing eight @-@ armed Ardhanarishvara . The upper male arms hold a lute and akshamala (rosary) , while the upper female ones hold a mirror and a book ; the others are broken . Another non @-@ conventional Ardhanarishvara is found at Darasuram . The sculpture is three @-@ headed and eight @-@ armed , holding akshamala , khadga (sword) , pasha , musala , kapala (skull cup) , lotus and other objects .

Other textual descriptions

The Naradiya Purana mentions that Ardhanarishvara is half @-@ black and half @-@ yellow , nude on one side and clothed on other , wearing skulls and a garland of lotuses on the male half and female half respectively . The Linga Purana gives a brief description of Ardhanarishvara as making varada and abhaya mudras and holding a trishula and a lotus . The Vishnudharmottara Purana prescribes a four @-@ armed form , with right hands holding a rosary and trishula , while the left ones bear a mirror and a lotus . The form is called Gaurishvara in this text .

= = Legends = =

The mythology of Ardhanarishvara ? which mainly originates in the Puranic canons ? was developed later to explain existent images of the deity that had emerged in the Kushan era .

The unnamed half @-@ female form of Shiva is also alluded to in the epic Mahabharata . In Book XIII , Upamanyu praises Shiva rhetorically asking if there is anyone else whose half @-@ body is shared by his spouse , and adds that the universe had risen from the union of sexes , as represented by Shiva 's half @-@ female form . In some narratives , Shiva is described as dark and

fair @-@ complexioned , half yellow and half white , half woman and half man , and both woman and man . In Book XIII , Shiva preaches to Parvati that half of his body is made up of her body .

In the Skanda Purana , Parvati requests Shiva to allow her to reside with him , embracing " limb @-@ to @-@ limb " , and so Ardhanarishvara is formed . It also tells that when the demon Andhaka wanted to seize Parvati and make her his wife , Vishnu rescued her and brought her to his abode . When the demon followed her there , Parvati revealed her Ardhanarishvara form to him . Seeing the half @-@ male , half @-@ female form , the demon lost interest in her and left . Vishnu was amazed to see this form and saw himself in the female part of the form .

The Shiva Purana describes that the creator god Brahma created all male beings , the Prajapatis , and told them to regenerate , which they were unable to do . Confronted with the resulting decline in the pace of creation , Brahma was perplexed and contemplated on Shiva for help . To enlighten Brahma of his folly , Shiva appeared before him as Ardhanarishvara . Brahma prayed to the female half of Shiva to give him a female to continue creation . The goddess agreed and created various female powers from her body , thereby allowing creation to progress . In other Puranas like the Linga Purana , Vayu Purana , Vishnu Purana , Skanda Purana , Kurma Purana , and Markandeya Purana , Rudra (identified with Shiva) appears as Ardhanarishvara , emerging from Brahma 's head , forehead , mouth or soul as the embodiment of Brahma 's fury and frustration due to the slow pace of creation . Brahma asks Rudra to divide himself , and the latter complies by dividing into male and female . Numerous beings , including the 11 Rudras and various female shaktis , are created from both the halves . In some versions , the goddess unites with Shiva again and promises to be born as Sati on earth to be Shiva 's wife . In the Linga Purana , the Ardhanarishvara Rudra is so hot that in the process of appearing from Brahma 's forehead , he burns Brahma himself . Ardhanarishvara Shiva then enjoys his own half ? the Great Goddess ? by " the path of yoga " and creates Brahma and Vishnu from her body . In the repetitive cycle of aeons , Ardhanarishvara is ordained to reappear at the beginning of every creation as in the past .

The Matsya Purana describes how Brahma , pleased with a penance performed by Parvati , rewards her by blessing her with a golden complexion . This renders her more attractive to Shiva , to whom she later merges as one half of his body .

Tamil temple lore narrates that once the gods and sages (rishi) had gathered at Shiva 's abode , they prayed their respects to Shiva and Parvati . However , the sage Bhiringi had vowed to worship only one deity , Shiva , and ignored Parvati while worshipping and circumambulating him . Agitated , Parvati cursed Bhiringi to lose all his flesh and blood , reducing him to a skeleton . In this form Bhiringi could not stand erect , so the compassionate ones who witnessed the scene blessed the sage with a third leg for support . As her attempt to humiliate the sage had failed , Parvati punished herself with austerities that pleased Shiva and led him to grant her the boon of uniting with him , thereby compelling Bhiringi to worship her as well as himself in the form of Ardhanarishvara . However , the sage assumed the form of a beetle and circumambulating only the male half , drilling a hole in the deity . Amazed by his devotion , Parvati reconciled with the sage and blessed him . The seventh @-@ century Shaiva Nayanar saint Appar mentions that after marrying Parvati , Shiva incorporated her into half of his body .

In the Kalika Purana , Parvati (called Gauri here) is described as having suspected Shiva of infidelity when she saw her own reflection in the crystal @-@ like breast of Shiva . A conjugal dispute erupted but was quickly resolved , after which Parvati wished to stay eternally with Shiva in his body . The divine couple was thereafter fused as Ardhanarishvara . Another tale from North India also talks about Parvati 's jealousy . Another woman , the river Ganga ? often depicted flowing out of Shiva 's locks ? sat on his head , while Parvati (as Gauri) sat on his lap . To pacify Gauri , Shiva united with her as Ardhanarishvara .

Only in tales associated with the cult of Shakta (in which the Goddess is considered the Supreme Being) is the Goddess venerated as the Maker of All . In these tales , it is her body (not Shiva 's) which splits into male and female halves .

= = Symbolism = =

Ardhanarishvara symbolizes that the male and female principles are inseparable . The composite form conveys the unity of opposites (coniunctio oppositorum) in the universe . The male half of Ardhanarishvara stands for Purusha and female half is Prakriti . Purusha is the male principle and passive force of the universe , while Prakriti is the female active force ; both are " constantly drawn to embrace and fuse with each other , though ... separated by the intervening axis " . The union of Purusha (Shiva) and Prakriti (Shiva 's energy , Shakti) generates the universe , an idea also manifested in the union of the Linga of Shiva and Yoni of Devi creating the cosmos . The Mahabharata lauds this form as the source of creation . Ardhanarishvara also suggests the element of Kama or Lust , which leads to creation .

Ardhanarishvara signifies " totality that lies beyond duality " , " bi @-@ unity of male and female in God " and " the bisexuality and therefore the non @-@ duality " of the Supreme Being . It conveys that God is both Shiva and Parvati , " both male and female , both father and mother , both aloof and active , both fearsome and gentle , both destructive and constructive " and unifies all other dichotomies of the universe . While Shiva 's rosary in the Ardhanarishvara iconography associates him with asceticism and spirituality , Parvati 's mirror associates her to the material illusory world . Ardhanarishvara reconciles and harmonizes the two conflicting ways of life : the spiritual way of the ascetic as represented by Shiva , and the materialistic way of the householder as symbolized by Parvati , whose raison d'être in Hindu mythology is to lure the ascetic Shiva into marriage and the wider circle of worldly affairs . The interdependence of Shiva on his power (Shakti) as embodied in Parvati is also manifested in this form . Ardhanarishvara conveys that Shiva and Shakti are one and the same , an interpretation also declared in inscriptions found along with Ardhanarishvara images in Java and the eastern Malay Archipelago . The Vishnudharmottara Purana also emphasizes the identity and sameness of the male Purusha and female Prakriti , manifested in the image of Ardhanarishvara . According to Shaiva guru Sivaya Subramuniyaswami (1927 ? 2001) , Ardhanarishvara signifies that the great Shiva is " All , inseparable from His energy " (i.e. his Shakti) and is beyond gender .

Across cultures , hermaphrodite figures like Ardhanarishvara have traditionally been associated with fertility and abundant growth . In this form , Shiva in his eternal embrace with Prakriti represents the eternal reproductive power of Nature , whom he regenerates after she loses her fertility . " It is a duality in unity , the underlying principle being a sexual dualism " . Art historian Sivaramamurti calls it " a unique connection of the closely knit ideal of man and woman rising above the craving of the flesh and serving as a symbol of hospitality and parenthood " . The dual unity of Ardhanarishvara is considered " a model of conjugal inseparability " . Padma Upadhyaya comments , " The idea of ... Ardhanarishvara is to locate the man in the woman as also the woman in the man and to create perfect homogeneity in domestic affairs " .

Often , the right half of Ardhanarishvara is male and the left is female . The left side is the location of the heart and is associated with feminine characteristics like intuition and creativity , while the right is associated with the brain and masculine traits ? logic , valour and systematic thought . The female is often not equal in the Ardhanarishvara , the male god who is half female ; she remains a dependent entity . Ardhanarishvara " is in essence Shiva , not Parvati " . This is also reflected in mythology , where Parvati becomes a part of Shiva . It is likewise reflected in iconography : Shiva often has two supernatural arms and Parvati has just one earthly arm , and his bull vahana ? not her lion vahana ? typically accompanies them .

= = Worship and adoration = =

Ardhanarishvara is one of the most popular iconographic forms of Shiva . It is found in more or less all temples and shrines dedicated to Shiva all over India and South @-@ east Asia . There is ample evidence from texts and the multiple depictions of the Ardhanarishvara in stone to suggest that a cult centred around the deity may have existed . The cult may have had occasional followers , but was never aligned to any sect . This cult focusing on the joint worship of Shiva and the Goddess may even have had a high position in Hinduism , but when and how it faded away remains a mystery . Though a popular iconographic form , temples dedicated to the deity are few . A popular

one is located in Tiruchengode , while five others are located in Kallakkurichi taluk , all of them in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu .

The Linga Purana advocates the worship of Ardhanarishvara by devotees to attain union with Shiva upon dissolution of the world and thus attain salvation . The Ardhanarinateshvara Stotra is a popular hymn dedicated to the deity . The Nayanar saints of Tamil Nadu exalt the deity in hymns . While the 8th @-@ century Nayanar saint Cuntarar says that Shiva is always inseparable from the Mother Goddess , another 7th @-@ century Nayanar saint Campantar describes how the " eternal feminine " is not only his consort , but she is also part of him . The renowned Sanskrit writer Kalidasa (c . 4th ? 5th century) alludes Ardhanarishvara in invocations of his Raghuvamsa and Malavikagnimitram , and says that Shiva and Shakti are as inseparable as word and meaning . The 9th @-@ century Nayanar saint Manikkavacakar casts Parvati in the role of the supreme devotee of Shiva in his hymns . He alludes to Ardhanarishvara several times and regards it the ultimate goal of a devotee to be united with Shiva as Parvati is in the Ardhanarishvara form .