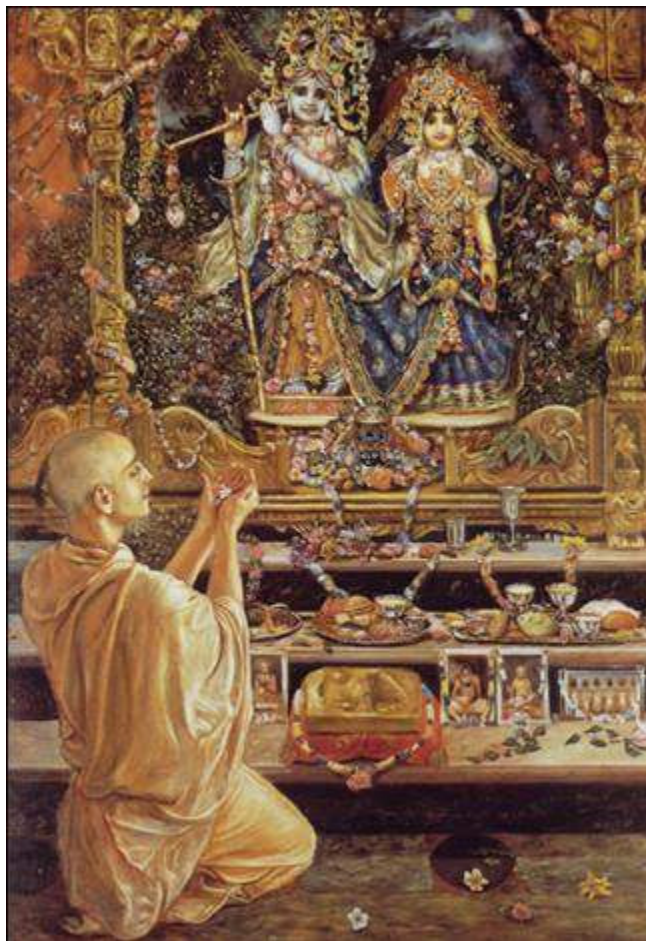


IDOL WORSHIP – A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE



Hinduism is a very ancient religion and a spiritualistic treasure house in the real sense. Although the basic preachings of almost all the major religions are very similar, differences do exist in the way the followers practice their faith. One of the main characteristics of practising this religion is – IDOL WORSHIP. This is really unique considering that Hinduism actually believes in the formlessness and oneness of the Supreme. But, it pains me a great deal when ignorant people from the western world, believers of other faiths and some Hindus as well, derive mocking pleasure by terming Hinduism as a religion of '*countless Gods*'! They fail to understand the significance that idol worship carries with it.

Firstly, some faiths have the tendency to seat the Almighty very high, high above the common man's reach. This isn't the case here. Idol worship is but an attempt to get God closer to everyone, be it the pauper or the king. It also helps the man on the street visualise God, His supreme powers, His grace, and the love that he carries for all His subjects. It's all right for the upper crest of the society to scan through bulky books for spiritual knowledge, but have you wondered what the poor and illiterate should resort to for their spiritual needs?

It is here that they need something simple and easy to understand. Idol worship brings God right into their homes. One can derive extreme spiritualistic satisfaction out of the daily service (i.e. *puja*) that they offer to the almighty. For example,

during the festival 'DURGA PUJA', very beautiful idols of the goddess are welcomed into each and every Hindu household with great fanfare. Mother 'Durga' is treated as if she were just another family member. And that means she's fed like any other family member, given new clothes to wear and host of other normal things. A great chemistry is made to exist between the almighty and his subjects during this time. Isn't the entire procedure simplicity personified?

And yet, to the normal ignorant eye, these would be mere rituals in front of a clay idol!

The doubts and criticisms have always been there and some great Hindu saints have successfully put them to rest as well. Following is a classic example of that: -

"Once a Rajput ruler was speaking to Swami Vivekananda at his palatial residence. He started airing his views against idol worship. Swami listened patiently. The intensity of his criticism grew more as his views failed to evoke the Swami's response.

Finally the Swami asked the king to get a portrait of his late father. The Swami then asked him to spit on the same. The king was furious!

Then, the Swami spoke, "although you know that your father is dead, you could not spit on his portrait. That is because you always feel the presence, guidance and love of your father through the portrait. Similar is the status of the relationship between man and God by the virtue of idol worship.

The king fell down at the feet of Swami Vivekananda and soon became his disciple."

The above story hardly leaves any scope or need of any conclusion to the article.