



Wisdom Magazine



INDIA AND HINDUISM



A Picture Book
Volume One

Somparn Promta



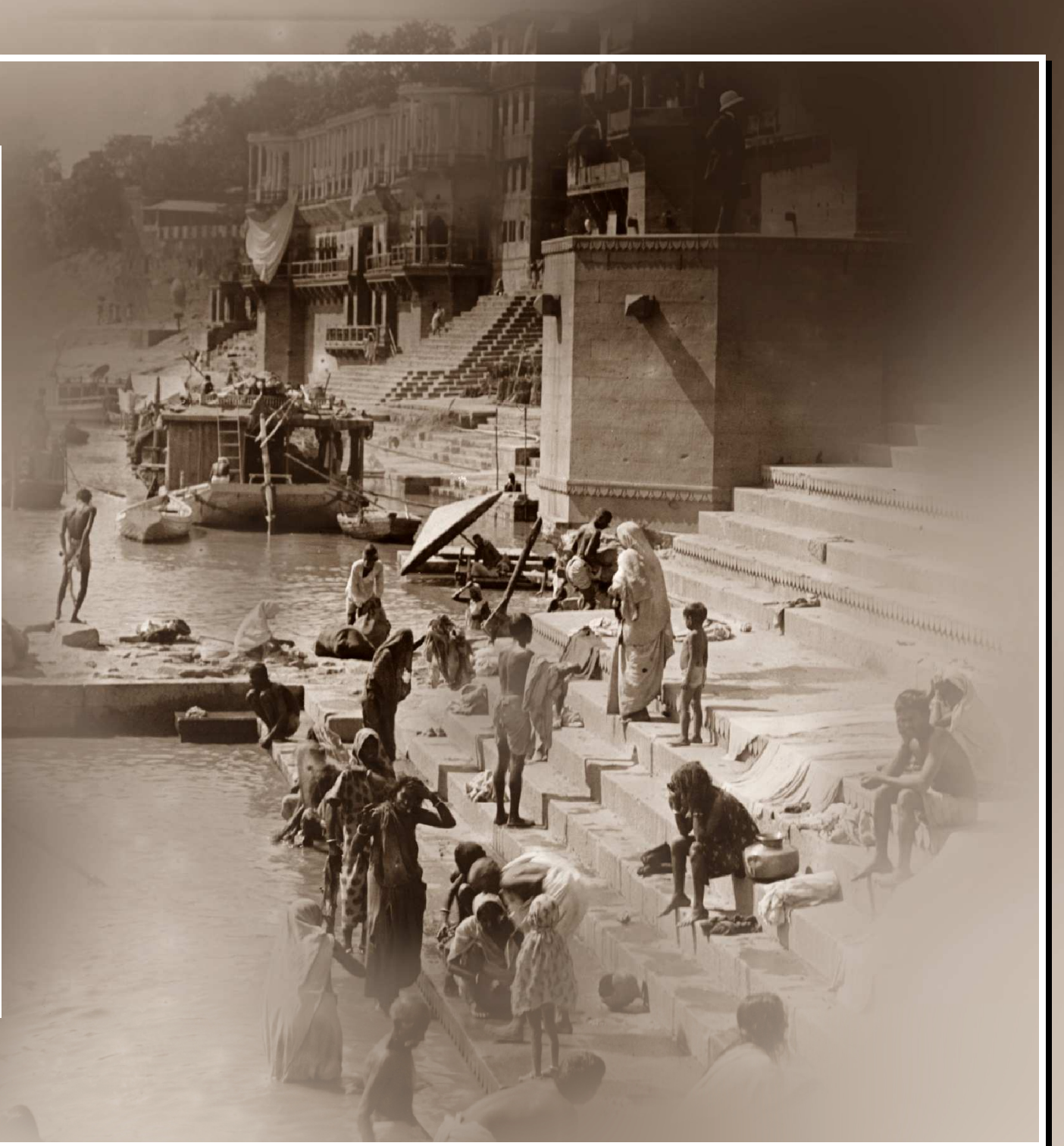
India and Hinduism

A Picture Book
Volume One

Somporn Promta
Department of Philosophy
Chulalongkorn University

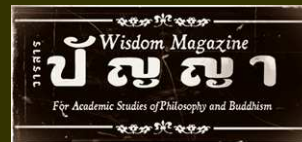


'eBook Project'
Wisdom Magazine
Volume 15
First Edition, 2011



Book Title: India and Hinduism (Volume One)

Author: Somparn Promta



'eBook Project'
Wisdom Magazine
Volume 15
First Edition, 2011

Cover and Book Design
Somparn Promta

Preface

This book was conceived from my idea that sometimes only one picture can say so many things better than thousands of words. The book was designed as a 'picture book' which means the book in which the contents are directed by pictures rather than the text. However, a short text is needed, like a silent movie, to communicate some main topics. The book was originally written to be used in my class in Chula, 'Basic Thoughts of Asia.' It contains two volumes. The first one deals with popular Hinduism, and the second one with scholarly Hinduism.

Somporn Promta

Part One
Introduction

India is one of the most amazing lands of the world. It is well known that Indian culture has deeply influenced Thai culture. The main religion that we adopt in the country, Buddhism, has its roots in the land of Indian people. Besides this, another religion namely Hinduism is accepted to have the deep influence on Thai culture especially that concerning the royal court.

Religion originates from the thought of human beings. Human beings have some reasons when they look at themselves and things around them. The reasons as said are the foundation of Indian religion. So, to understand Indian religion, we need to understand the thought of Indian people.

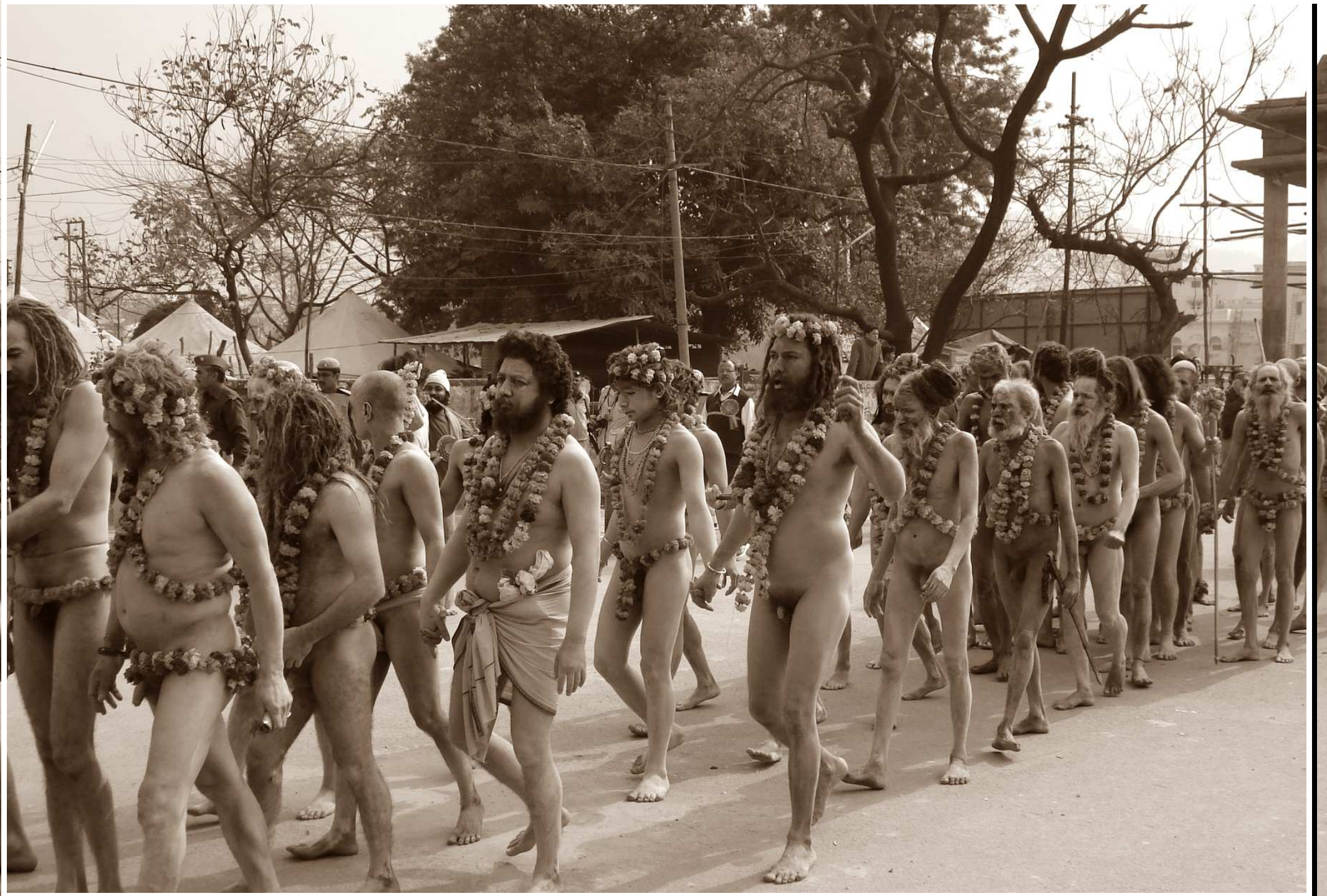
To begin our journey to the land of Indian people, consider the following pictures and ask yourselves what are you thinking?



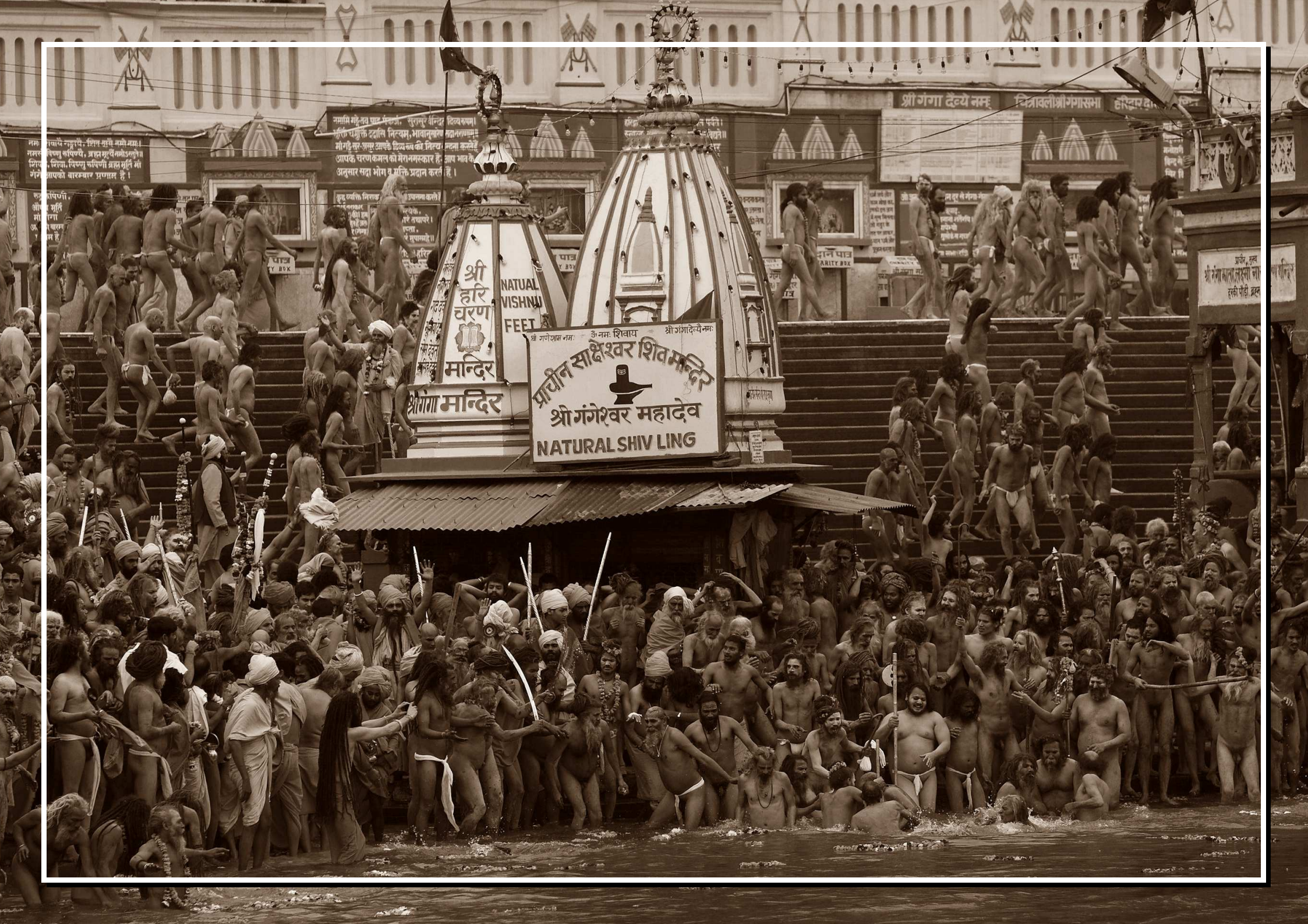


The above two pictures are of the Indian ascetics. Both of them are sitting on the bed of spikes. You may wonder why they do such a thing. As said previously, Indian people have some reasons in doing something that follows their religious belief. So, they must have some reason in doing what you are seeing now.

There are many people in the world being of a thought that India is the land of hermits who torture themselves, or practice some strange religious rituals, to attain religious salvation. This kind of thought may be right? Consider the following pictures. They are of Indian ascetics as well. (Sorry, if you feel they are offensive.)







The above pictures are of the Indian hermits called "Naga Sadhu," an Indian word which literally means the naked ascetics. Most or all of them are those who worship Shiva, one among the three Gods worshipped by Hindu people. These ascetics are marching to bathe in the Ganges, the most holy river of Hinduism.

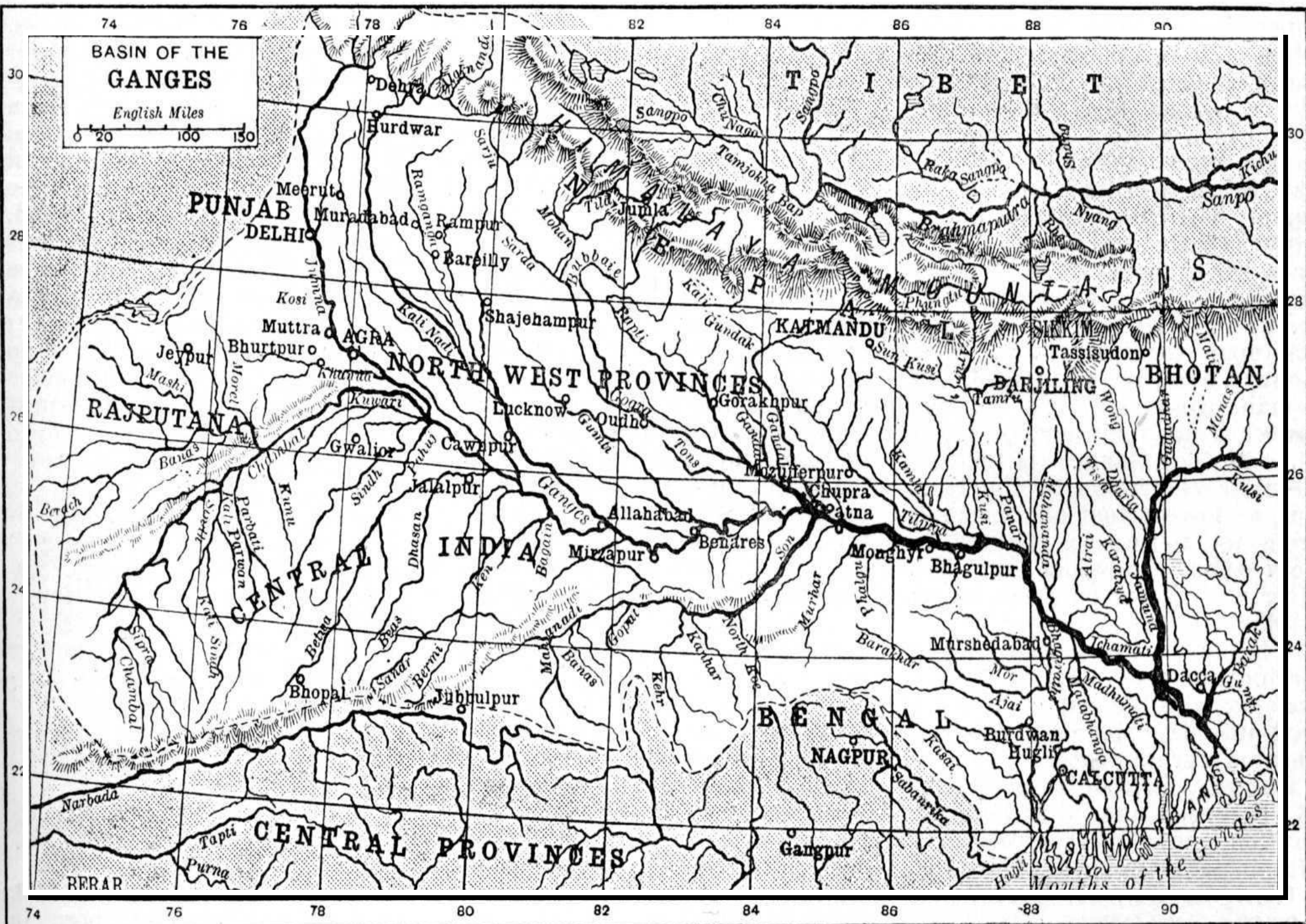
From above, we see that the practices of Indian people that we are seeing are mainly concerned with two things. The first thing is a God named Shiva. And the second thing is a river named the Ganges. Note that both of them are involved with Hinduism.

Hinduism is a new name of the oldest religion of India, Brahmanism.

It is believed among the Hindu people that the Ganges, (the river runs for 1560 miles from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal) flows from the heaven. It is a holy river as it flows from the heaven and as a gift of gods. As a holy river, the Ganges has so many meanings for the Hindu people. The following pictures will illustrate how much the lives of Hindu people are connected to this heavenly river.

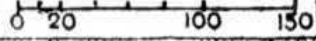






BASIN OF THE GANGES

English Miles



PUNJAB
DELHI

Muttra
AGRA

RAJPUTANA

CENTRAL INDIA

CENTRAL PROVINCES

BENGAL
NAGPUR

CALCUTTA

TIBET

NEPAL

NORTH WEST PROVINCES

KATMANDU

BARJILING

BHOTAN

Gangpur

Burdwan
Hugly

Madhundi
Matabhanga

Dacca

Marshedabad

Bhagulpur

Monghyr

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad

Dacca

Bhagulpur

Benares

Allahabad

Mirzapur

Bhopal

Jubbulpur

Burdwan

Burdwan

Marshedabad</





Bathing in the Ganges is a common practice among the Hindu people. They believe that doing so will wash away the sins unintentionally committed daily by them. In Buddhist texts, it is recorded that bathing in the Ganges was practiced by Hindu people at the time of the Buddha; and it was criticized as irrational practice by him.

The Buddha said that if bathing in the Ganges would send the person to the heaven, the fish and other animals living in the river might be born in the heaven as well. The critique of the Buddha is viewed by modern Hindu scholars as unfair to Hinduism—because the fish and animals living in the Ganges have no thought and faith. Bathing must be done on the basis of faith and understanding.

Besides being the place for washing away the sins, the Ganges is well known as the place to send dead people to the heaven. When a person died, his or her body will be taken to the shore of the Ganges. There, people will burn the dead body and then put the remains into the river. Sometimes, the dead body is thrown into the water to donate it to the fish and other water animals as to be seen in the following pictures.











For some people, what we have considered previously seems to be the 'serious' side of India. Is there anything in India which suggests that Indian people look at the world and the human life as joyful things, someone may question in his or her mind. Indian religious thought is so complex. The following picture would show some answers for the question.

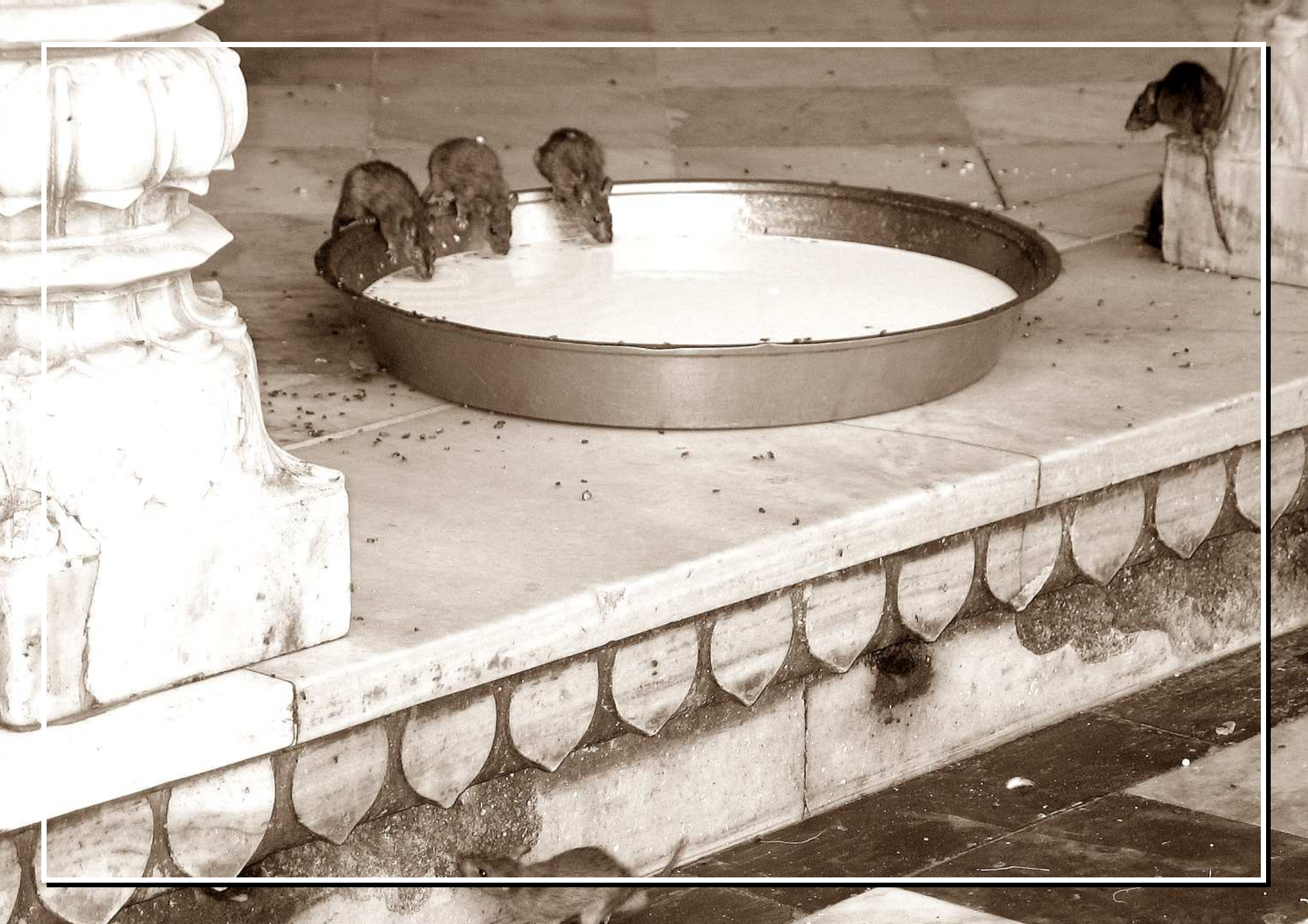




The above pictures are well known under the name of the Kamasutra sculptures. They are made as part of some Hindu temples. Some people from other countries came to India and were shocked, when saw these pictures, wondering why pornographic materials are given in the temples which are the holy place.

Note that sexual pleasure counts natural and not an evil in itself, in the view of Hinduism. It is interesting that from the beginning of this part, we have seen that Hinduism is the source of ascetic practices; but now the same Hinduism is the source of the practice to have sexual pleasures, as well. Is this contradiction in Hinduism, someone may question.

It is not easy to answer the above question as there seems to be really a contradicted picture in India—two pictures that we have seen are from the same religion. We know that most of Hindu people are vegetarian. Animals, especially those related to religious belief, are well treated, as to be seen in the following pictures.



















For those who have regularly visited India, the picture of the rats in the temples is something not strange. And the picture of the cows living on the streets is a common scene as well. It is known among the Hindu people that the god named Ganesha has his riding vehicle as the rat. So, in the temple where people worship Ganesha, the rats are treated as holy animals as seen. They feed them milk and other food.

Cows are holy animals in the Hindu tradition. There are many tales concerning its holiness. Some theory states that the cow gives milk to man, and this is interpreted as 'giving life.' In Indian tradition, people consume a lot of milk. So, we understand why they worship the cows as a holy animal. Normally, the Hindu people reject eating a cow's meat.

There are a lot of cows living in public places such as a market, or a street. These cows are considered as public properties. The Hindu people have tradition to feed them. When they walk or sleep on the street, the car-driver does not think, "These animals have no right to walk or sleep on the street." They respect cows.

The influence of religious belief as said above might be the main source that makes Indian food tradition avoid meat-eating. I have visited India two times, in the academic conference. During the staying in India, I have found that non-vegetarian food is very rare.

However, as seen in the last two pictures above, some Indian people eat meat. They have the meat market.

An Indian man says in the Internet,

“I was born in India and have been a vegetarian since birth. However, I never had passion for vegetarianism before I relocated to Australia. Now, promoting vegetarianism is the main goal of my life. India, definitely, is a beautiful country; increasing affordability and globalization are improving the living standards on one hand but are bringing in meat-culture through KFC and McDonald's. I wish every Indian reads this article and gets some inspiration to continue to remain a vegetarian.”

Part Two
A Belief in Gods

Hinduism is a theistic religion, a religion that believes God or gods really exist; and the happening of the universe cannot be explained without reference to God or gods.

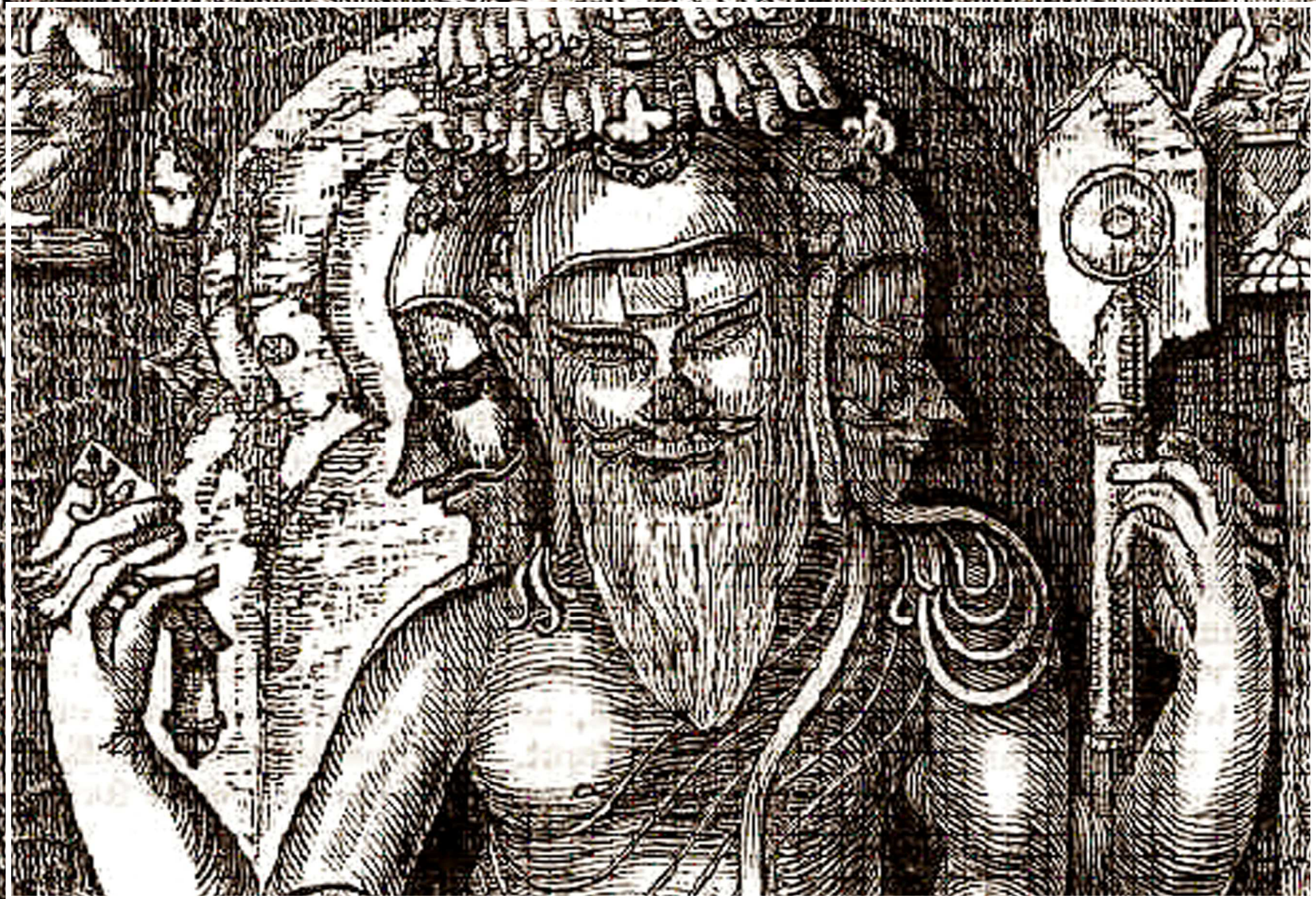
There are three main kinds of theism:

- monotheism,
- polytheism,
- pantheism.

Monotheism is a religion which believes that there is only one God playing the role as the creator of man and the universe. There could be other heavenly beings such as angels or gods; but these beings are not God, all of them are created by God. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism belong to this kind of theism.

Polytheism is a religion which believes that there are more than one God to create man and the universe. Popular Hinduism, the Hinduism that adopted and practiced by lay people, belongs to this category. In the view of Hindu lay people, there are two kinds of gods. The first one is 'Big Gods,' the second one is 'small gods.'

There are three Big Gods: Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. Big Gods are those who play the important roles in the universe. It is believed among the Hindu people that the role of Brahma is to create the universe. The role of Vishnu is to protect the universe. And the role of Shiva is to destroy the universe. The following are images of these Big Gods respectively.







Note that each Big God has His own special characteristics. The God Brahma has four faces. The God Shiva is naked. The picture of Shiva clearly shows His erect penis. This image of Shiva later influenced the making of a holy object called 'Shiva Lingam' which means the holy penis of Shiva. The following Thai amulet is believed to be a realistically transformed Shiva Lingam, compared with the original in the last picture.

Handwritten text in Telugu script on a palm leaf, partially visible at the top of the page.

Handwritten text in Telugu script on a palm leaf, including the characters 'శ్రీ' and 'ల'.

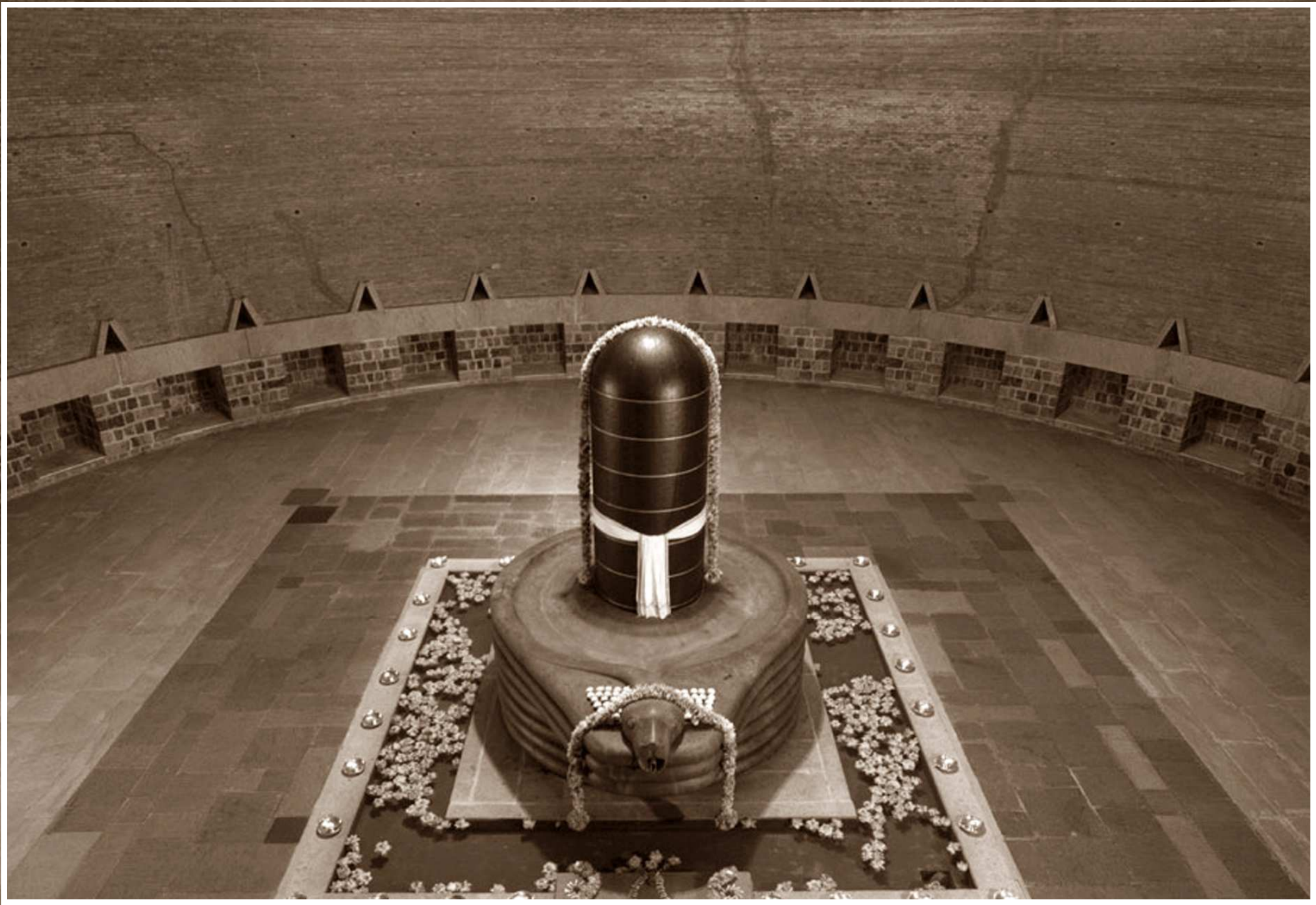
Handwritten text in Telugu script on a palm leaf, including the characters 'శ్రీ' and 'ల'.

Handwritten text in Telugu script on a palm leaf, including the characters 'శ్రీ' and 'ల'.

Handwritten text in Telugu script on a palm leaf, including the characters 'శ్రీ' and 'ల'.

A collection of palm leaves with handwritten Telugu text, arranged vertically on the right side of the page.

A collection of palm leaves with handwritten Telugu text, arranged horizontally at the bottom of the page.



Hinduism believes that in the beginning, there were four things naturally existing in the universe. They are 'matter' and three Big Gods. When the God Brahma has to create the universe, He just collects matter and forms it to be the suns, the stars, and so on.

When the universe, including man, was already created, Brahma has completed his role. The next responsibility is given to Vishnu.

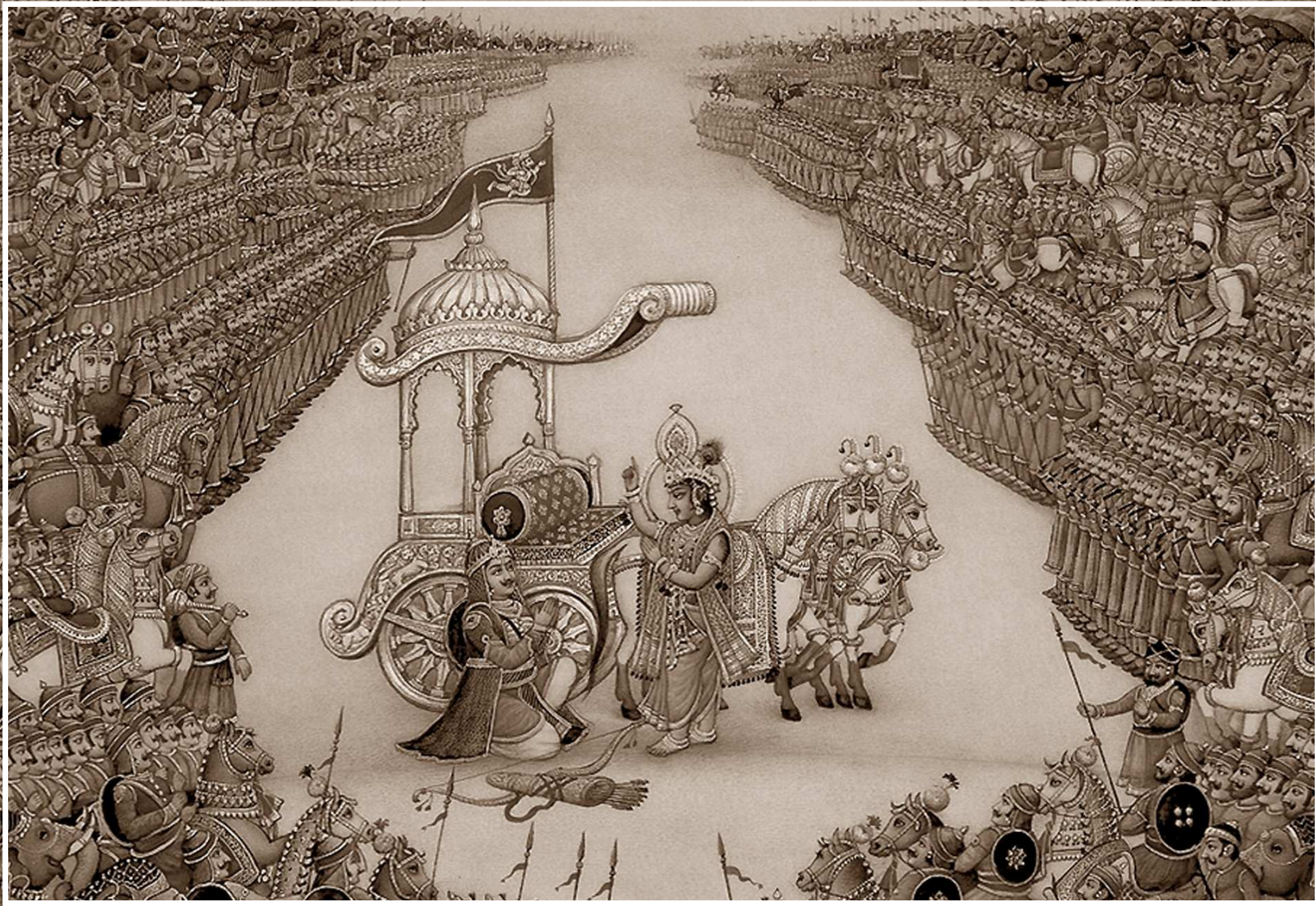
The God Brahma chooses to create human beings as a free creature. Man can choose to do good or evil, as he likes it. The destiny of mankind and the world depends on man. If they are good, the world will be stable; and if not, man has to be responsible for that.

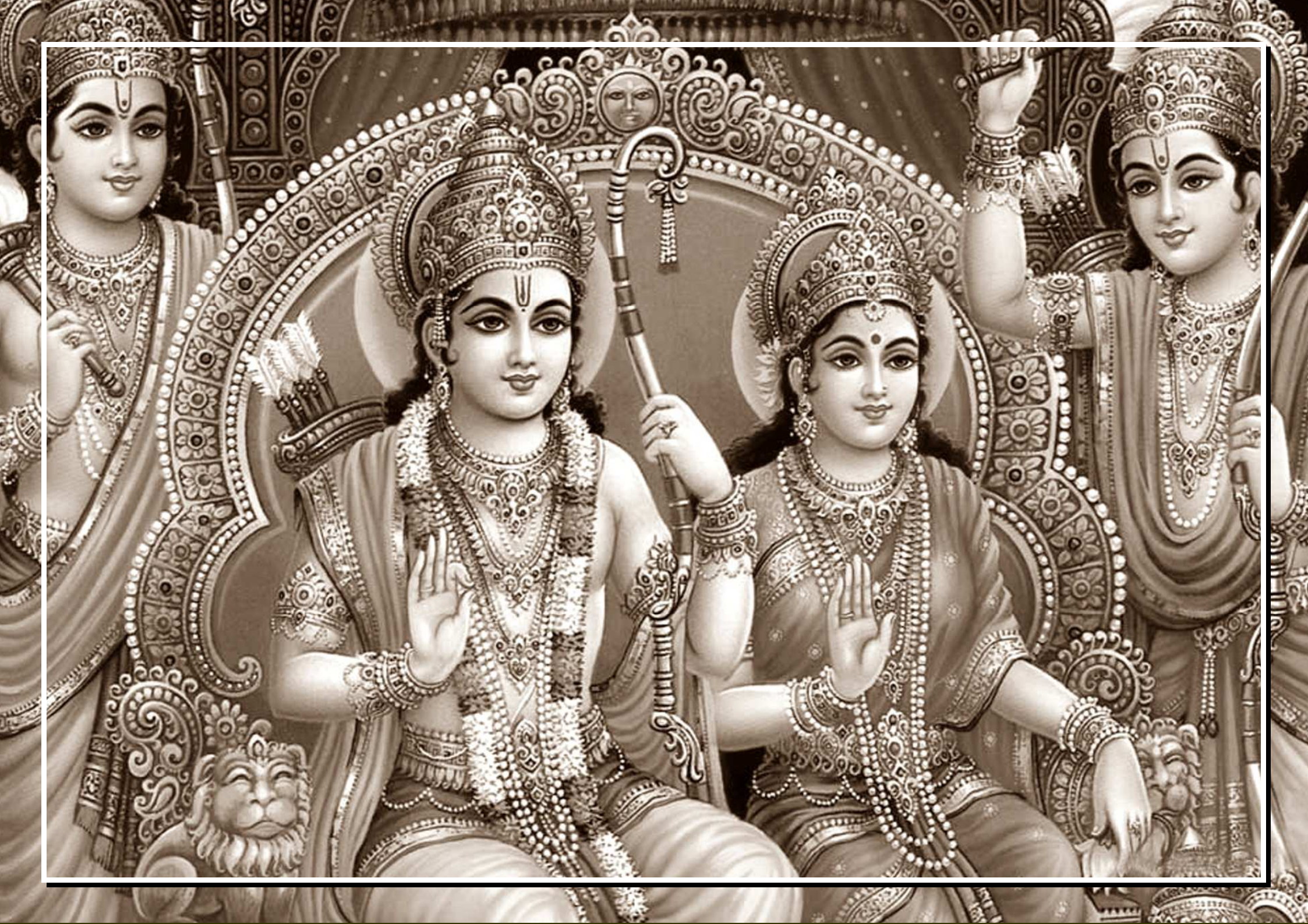
The basic role of Vishnu is to teach morality to man. He is believed to be reincarnated in the human form, teaching good things as the masters of religion or moral heroes.

It is believed that there are ten incarnations of the Lord Vishnu. The past nine ones have already happened. The last one is waiting to occur.

Among the past nine incarnations, the three ones are more well-known: Rama, Krishna, and Buddha. The first two names are associated with two great epics of India: the 'Ramayana' and the 'Mahabharata.' Rama is the moral hero in the first epic, and Krishna is the moral hero in the second one.







The first two pictures are of Lord Krishna. They are taken from the scenes in the 'Bhagavadgita,' a great Hindu holy text. In that text, Arjuna, a chief warrior decides to 'not fight' in the moral war, the war made to protect righteousness. Krishna, who is Lord Vishnu incarnate, gives Arjuna the religious discourse to convince him that fighting in the holy war is a good thing. The content of the discourse later becomes the 'Bhagavadgita.'

It should be noted that Hinduism counts the Buddha as a Lord Vishnu incarnate, meaning that Buddhism counts as a school of Hinduism. For the Hindu people, this claim is positive—they have an opened mind to include Buddhism as ‘our religion.’ But in the view of Buddhists, this claim is negative. They believe that the Buddha totally rejects Hinduism. So, it is not possible to include him as a Hindu.

It is believed that as a free creature, the majority of man may choose evil rather than good. In such a period of the history, the Lord Vishnu will stop his mission, and then give everything to the hands of Shiva.

The duty of the Lord Shiva is to destroy the world. However, the process of destruction as said is not easy as there are some good people living among the evil majority. Shiva has to separate them before the great destruction.

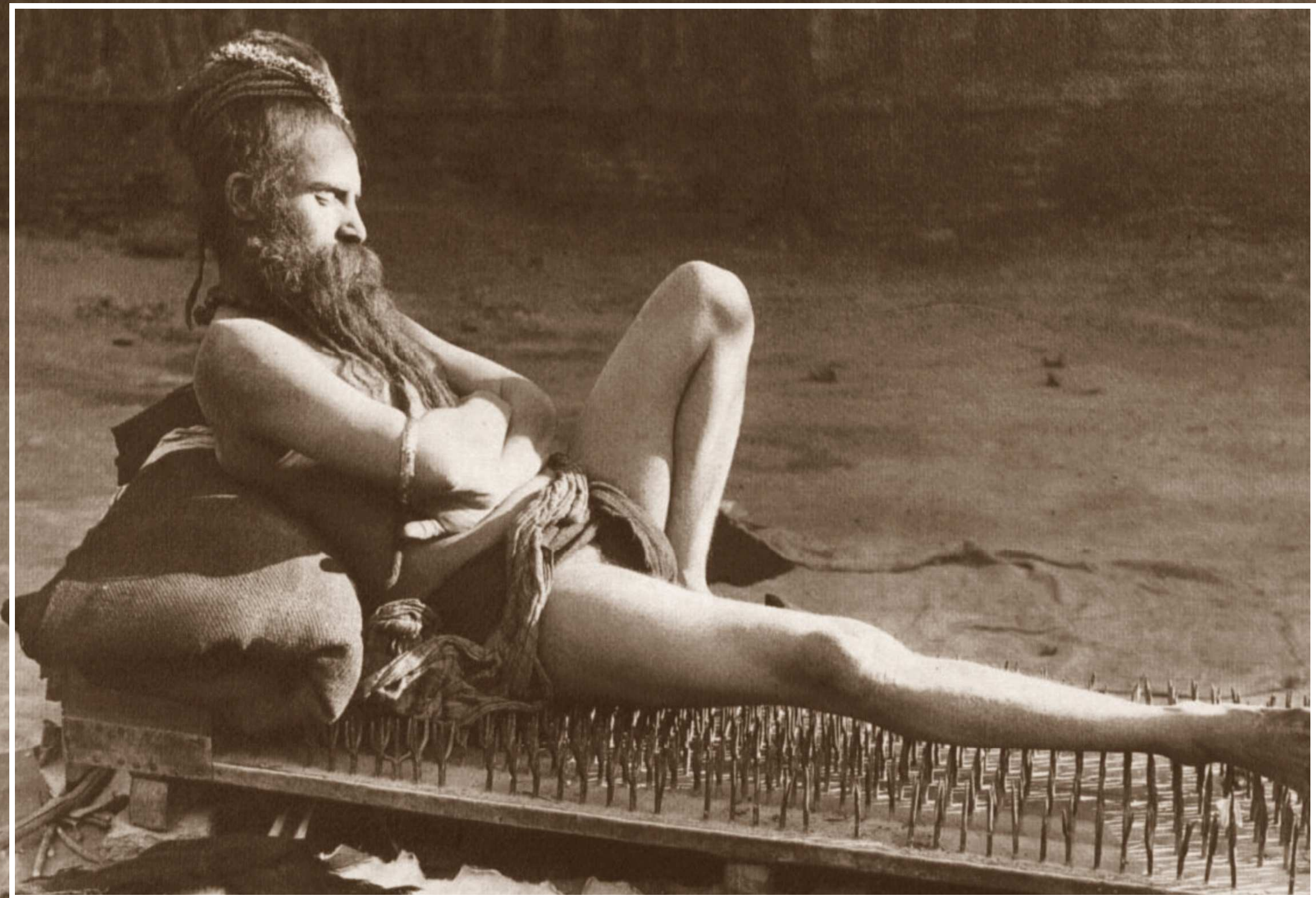
The 'Naga Sadhu' that we have seen previously are those who believe that they have received the message from the Lord Shiva. Their asceticism is practiced on the basis of understanding that they will join the heaven with the Lord Shiva after death.

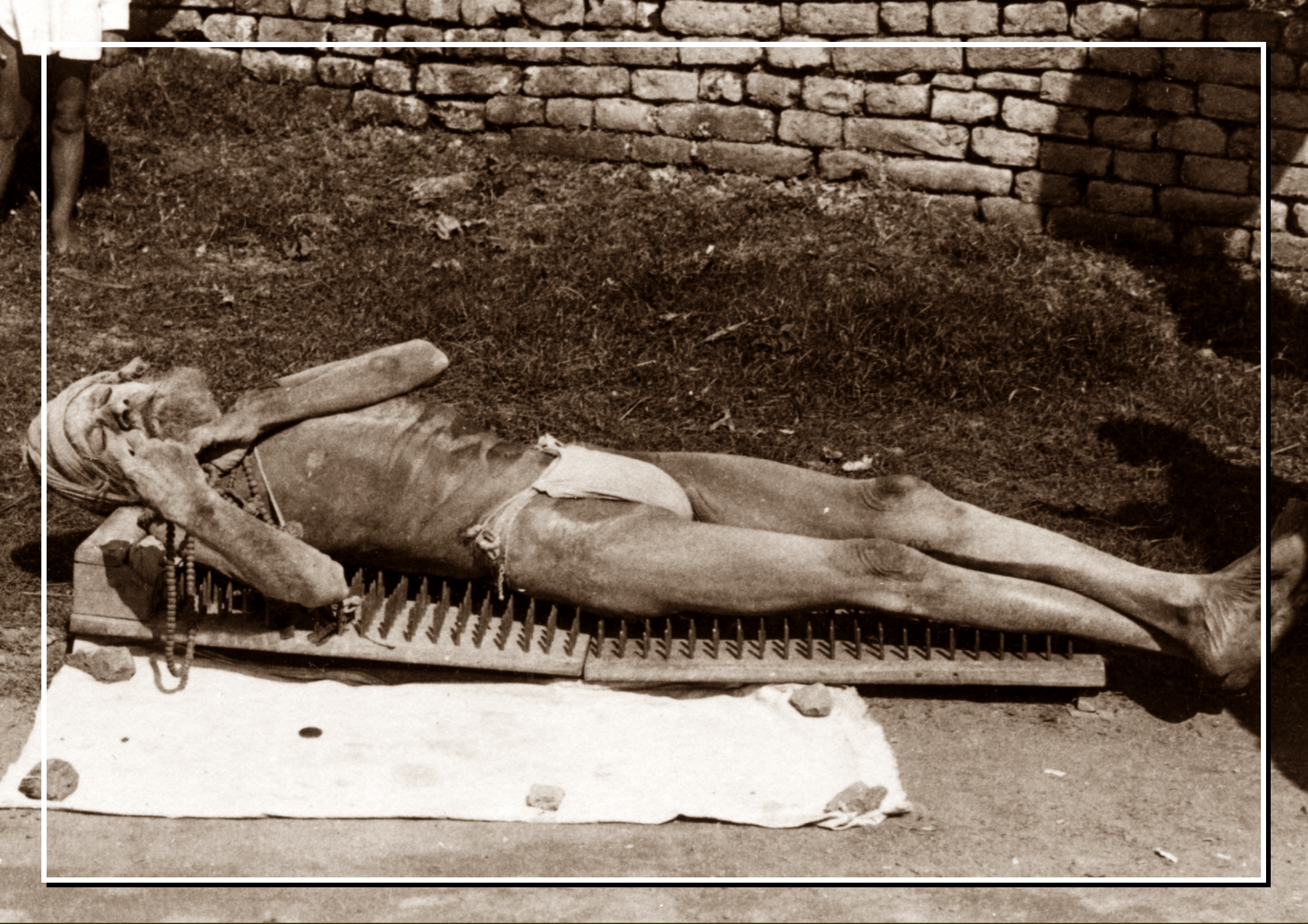
And then, when the whole world does not have this kind of people, the Lord will start the process of great destruction. When everything was completely destroyed, the Lord Brahma will create the universe again.

There are some important differences between those who worship the Lord Vishnu and the Lord Shiva. These differences could be summed up into two words.

That is: those who worship Shiva seem to be the 'hard-core' practitioners; while those who worship Vishnu seem to be the 'soft-core' ones.

Consider and compare the following pictures!















40 YEARS OF ISKCON I
SRI KRISHNA BALARAM MANDIR
VRINDAVAN
KARTIK FESTIVAL 2006





The above pictures belong to two groups, which greatly differ. Those, whose Lord is Shiva, seem to be the serious persons and their practices seem to indicate that they have no hope for the future of this world. Self-torture like lying on the bed of nails is done for the purpose to please their Lord. Those who worship Vishnu are of the hope that this world is worth making 'our home.' They do not practice self-torture as it is seen not necessary; their Lord does not like it.

Note that Brahma seems to have the little role in India, compared with Shiva and Vishnu. We know that in India there are two main schools of Hinduism: the first one worships Lord Vishnu, and the second one worships Lord Shiva. There is no school dedicated to the worship of Lord Brahma. But in Thailand, people know Brahma best. They do not know and worship Shiva and Vishnu. The following is a picture of Brahma's worship in Thailand. This Brahma's statue is located at a famous hotel in Bangkok.



To conclude this part, we have seen that Hindu people have their different Gods and gods, and such a difference makes them differ in religious practice. However, all of them perform the religious ritual in the hope that such a thing will please the God or god that they worship. Polytheism of the Hindu people is something simple and not difficult to understand. However, this simple thing has so deep influence on their lives.

Part Three
Sex and Hinduism

Normally, most of religion has an inclination to look at sex as a dirty thing. Holy persons in the view of religion must not be involved with sexual activity. Thai people cannot accept when they know that a Buddhist monk has sexual relation with other: male, female, or homosexual persons. The same is applied to a Catholic priest. Holy life in the view of Theravada Buddhism and Catholicism must not be involved with sex.

In India, there are the Hindu temples where the following pictures are seen. These pictures seem to indicate that Hinduism looks at sex from the different perspective, compared with Theravada Buddhism and Catholicism.

Why Hinduism looks at sex like that?

Why religion in general considers sex as a dirty thing or an evil?

After seeing the pictures we shall discuss these questions.













In terms of biology, sex is the machinery for the survival of man, animals, and even plants. The question is: if we, the theists, accept that God is the creator of everything, including biological facts found in living organisms, why sex counts as evil?

The Hindu people think that if we consider sex as evil, there must be a contradiction in our belief. They think, "If sex is evil, why God has created it inside us?"

According to general Hinduism, when the Lord Brahma has been creating man and animals, He has put sexual instinct inside them to play the role as the machinery of reproduction. That is: the Lord needs man and animals live in this world as long as possible, so they have to reproduce themselves. Sexual pleasure is viewed as a reward given to man and animals by God for their performance of reproduction. In this sense, sex is a natural phenomenon, like eating, drinking, or breathing. All of them are activities done for the survival of life.

Some of Indian religion like Hinduism is 'naturalist' religion in the sense that biological facts are counted as God's creation, thus there is no 'evil-in-itself' in these things.

Moreover, Hinduism is of the view that goodness taught in religion should follow human biological facts. This is the reason why they teach that there are four objectives of life in Hinduism. These things are designed to fit biological facts of man as said.

The first objective, or the good thing, is called 'artha' which means knowledge. The 'youth' must take this thing to be used as a means for living in the future.

The second one is 'kama' which means sensual pleasure, including sexual delight. The 'householder' (the person who has passed the period of youth) must take it, because it is the good thing for them.

The third one is 'dharma' which means religious life. This is designed for those who have passed the householder period. In short, when the person is old, say after 60, they should leave all sensual pleasures to dedicate the rest of their life to religious practices. Note that this period, in terms of biology, naturally fits religious practice, while the former ones do not.

The last one is 'moksha' which means the liberation of the soul. This is believed to be the result of true practice of the third one. Hinduism believes that every person has the potential to attain the liberation of the soul; and the person should die with this state of life.

Wealth and sensual pleasures found in the second stage finally are just illusion. We must abandon them, at last.



VATSYAYANA
KAMA
SUTRA

THE HINDU RITUAL OF LOVE

COMPLETE and UNEXPURGATED

There is a kind of Hindu texts dedicated to explore how to gain 'kama.' It is called the 'Kama Shastra' which means the science of sexual delight. All of them are written by holy saints of Hindu tradition. The well known one among these is the 'Kama Sutra' written by Vatsyayana.

So, the pictures that we have seen above concerning sexual activities, presented at the Hindu temples, are based on the belief in the four objectives, or good things, in human life. These pictures are not pornographic, but religious. A philosophical idea behind this is: we should look at sex as a positive thing. Sex is not a dirty thing. We are born from sexual activity of our parents. Life without sex is not normal life!

Part Four
The Caste System

The last thing in popular Hinduism to be explored is the caste system. In India, Hindu people are divided into four classes, ranging from the highest to the lowest, as follows.

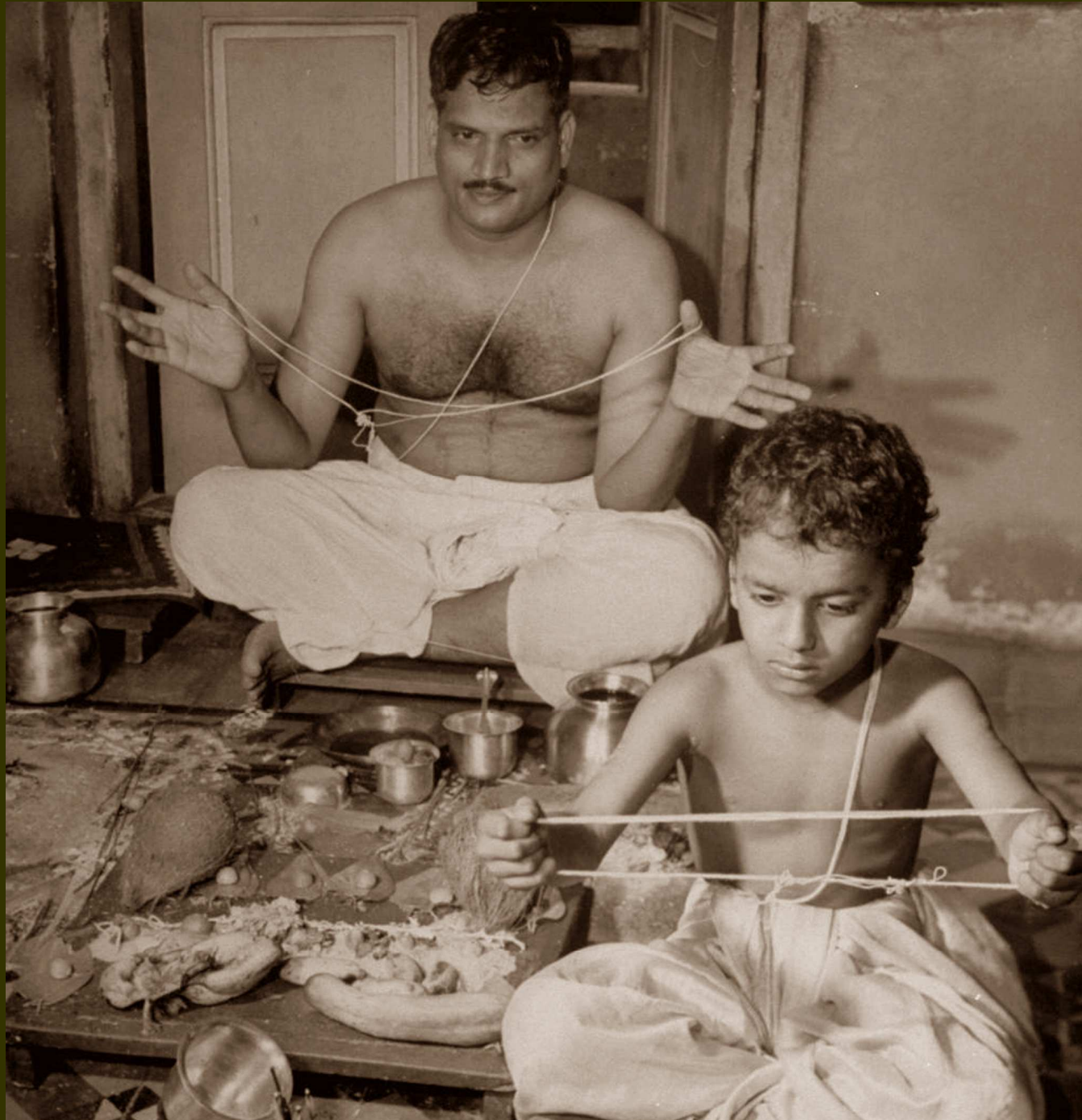
- the Brahmin caste
- the Kshatriya caste
- the Vaishya caste
- the Shudra caste

The caste system is a religious system. So, it has the notable strength in terms of ideology and culture.

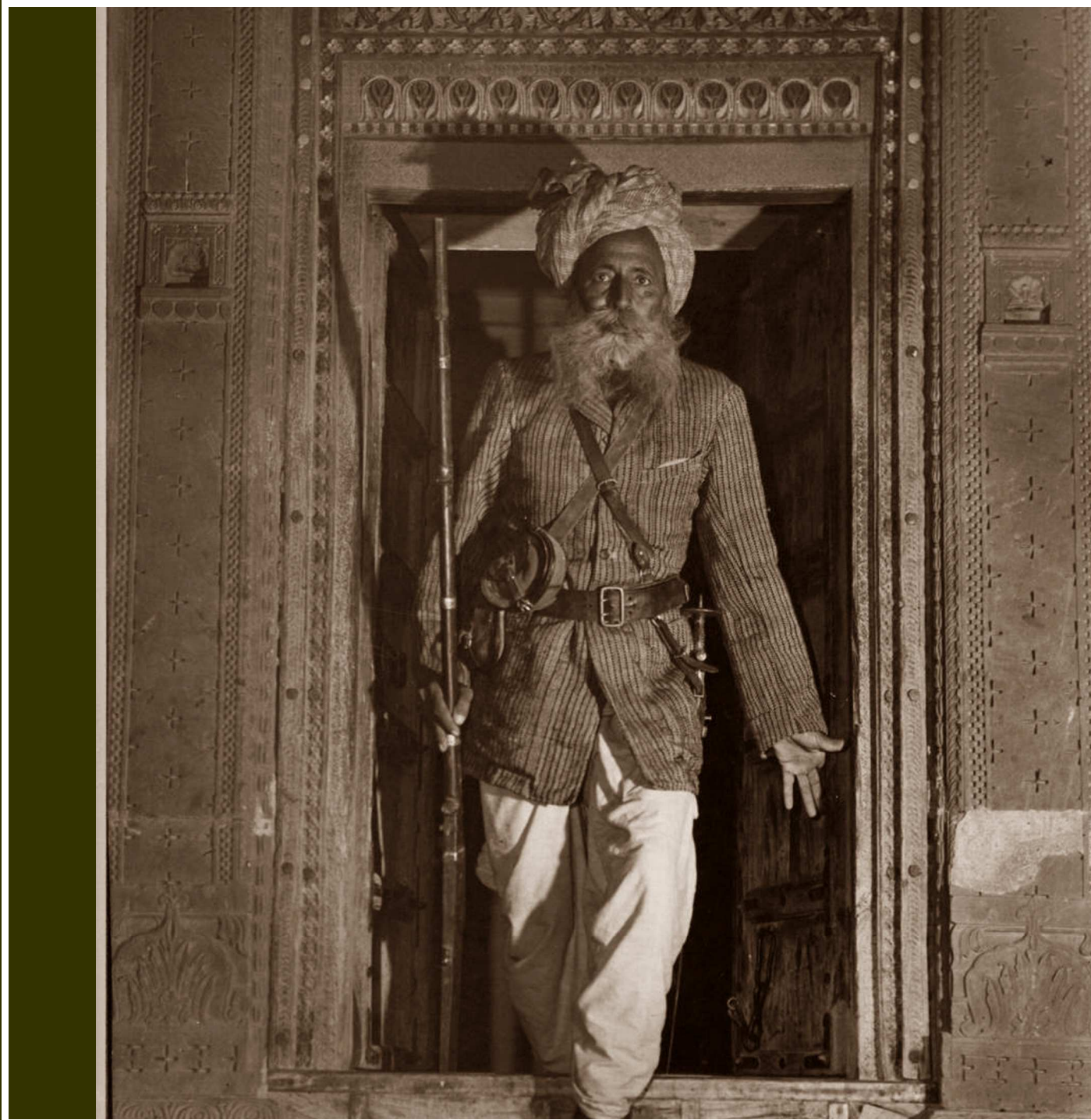
The tale concerning the casts says that when the Lord Brahma has been creating man, He thinks, "How to create them." And then he has found that His body consists of parts. Every part plays the equal significant role for the whole system. Society could be compared with a body. So, the members of society should be different like the different parts of the body.

The Lord decides to create human beings into the four classes for the reason that each of them will perform different duties for the welfare of the whole.

At first, the caste system has nothing related to social injustice. But later, it has a negative effect to those belonging to the lowest class. According to the Hindu texts, such as the 'Law of Manu,' the three upper classes only count as the members of religious empire. They have religious rights to learn the teaching of Hinduism. The Shudra do not have such rights. Education in ancient time was basically based on religious teaching, so the lowest class was cut off from education. Normally, they are poor and low-educated, compared with the three upper castes. Caste is inherited. It can never be changed!



A Brahmin
father
teaching
his son to
perform
religious
ritual.



A man
from
Kshatriya
caste.

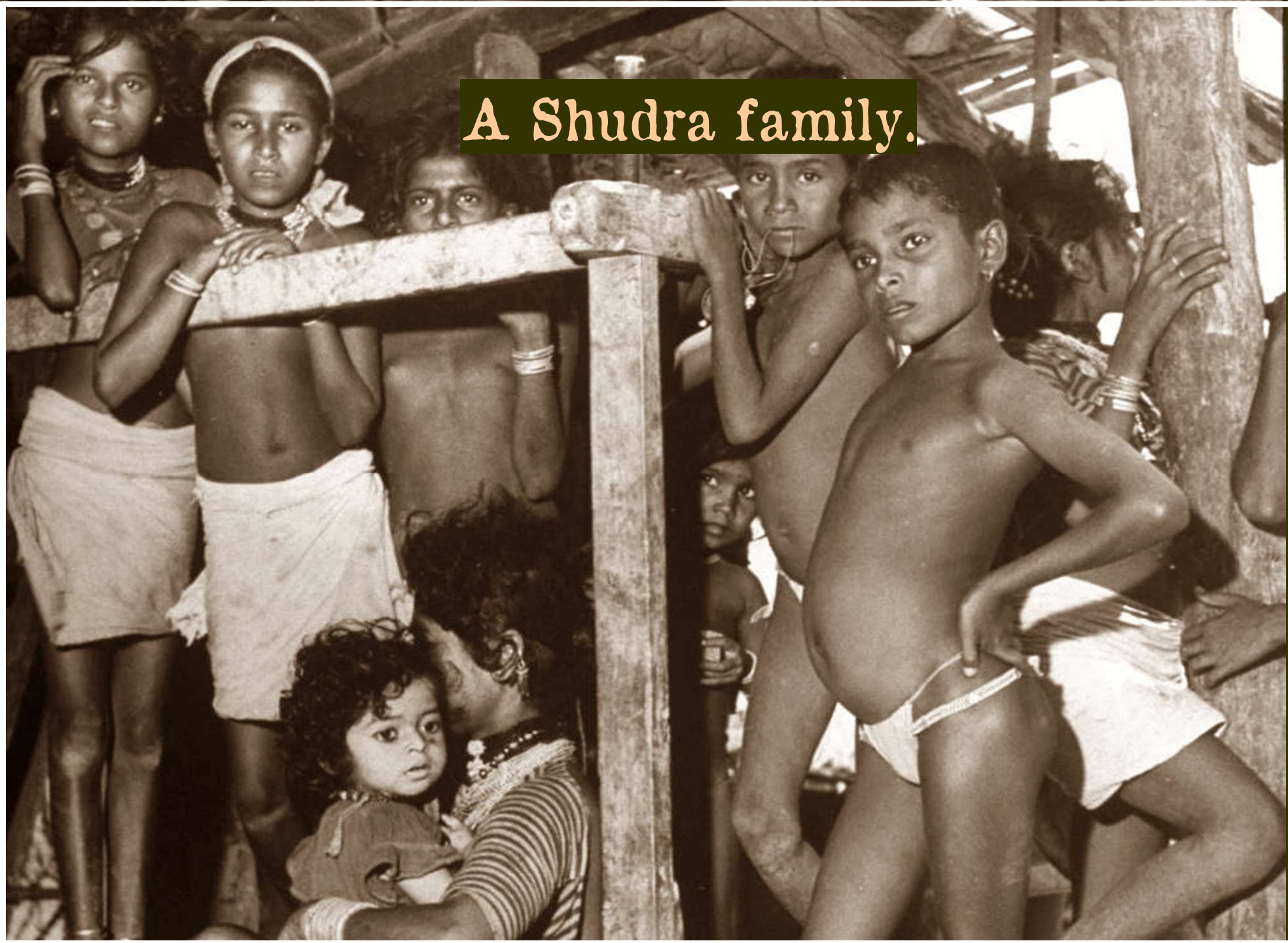
The potters of Vaishya caste.



Fishermen of Shudra or Untouchable caste



A Shudra family.



An Untouchable girl.



At the ancient time, the Brahmin class played the role as a religious teacher and other related subjects such as arts and science that based on Hindu teaching and philosophy. The Kshatriya played the role as the kings and warriors. The Vaishya played the role as businessmen or those who had their own business such as farmers and potters. The Shudra class was determined, in law and religious text, to be workers. They could not have their own business, the law explicitly states that.

Today, in terms of law, the caste system does not exist in India. But in terms of religion and culture, it still exists. The lowest class, the Shudra or the untouchable, still remains the poorest people in India. Modern Hindu thinkers such as Mahatma Gandhi have tried extremely to bring the concept of caste to its former state: God creates caste for the purpose of labor-division only. Gandhi says that the lowest class is the son of the same Father God as worshipped by the upper classes. They should be deemed as 'brothers' of another class. They are human in the fullest sense not differently from a Brahmin, a Kshatriya, or a Vaishya.



End of First Volume

Acknowledgments



All pictures used in this book are gained from the Internet. Thanks to the unknown original creators of them. I believe that they must share a thing called in Indian tradition as 'punya' from the making of this book. The use of their work is done on the basis of my personal respect of them.