

HINDU GODS AND GODDESSES DISHONoured

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HINDU GODS AND GODDESSES DISHONoured

Hinduism or the '*Sanatan Dharma*' is the oldest religion among all major religions of the world. India is the home of Hinduism. The characteristic of Hinduism is that it is not founded by any prophet. As the name '*Sanatan Dharma*' signifies, it is an eternal religion. It has neither a beginning nor an end. The followers of Hinduism or the Hindus believe in God. The powers or qualities of the Almighty, who is invisible, are visualized through different idols, to which the Hindus worship. As such the Hindus worship many Gods & Goddesses. The appearances of the deities are based on the mentions in the ancient Hindu religious texts. The deities are also depicted in paintings. However, the traditional art forms, which are treated with the idols and paintings of the deities, exist along with the realistic art forms of today.

In the olden days the idols were prepared mainly in stone, brass, bronze and wood whereas nowadays the idols are prepared in cement, plaster, plastic, fibre, ceramic, ivory, glass and alloys of different metals along with the traditional materials. The idols are generally worshipped inside temples whereas relatively smaller idols and pictures of the deities are worshipped at homes by millions of Hindus. However, during specific occasions idols of different deities, made up of clay, are worshipped by the people at decorated pandals which are later on immersed in flowing water.

The Hindus worship different Gods & Goddesses on specific days in a year and observe many religious ceremonies and festivals based on the Hindu calendar. As such the Hindus have the reputation of being very religious people. But it is a matter of great regret that the most revered Gods and Goddesses of Hinduism are being dishonoured at every moment in India, the country where majority of Hindus live. Of course, at times we come to know about some incidents of Hindu deities being deliberately treated in insulting manners in the West. All these unfortunate and undesirable incidents must stop. Unless the dignity and honour of the Hindu Gods & Goddesses are protected, Hinduism may not survive. The Hindu deities are dishonoured in various ways in India. Mostly the deities are dishonoured when printed pictures of the deities are discarded or left neglected and when the deities are treated as mere playthings. This article is an attempt to throw light on these sorrowful incidents.

Printed Pictures of the Deities Discarded or Neglected

Recently there has been remarkable advancement in the fields of photography and printing technology. People are benefitted in many ways. But thoughtless use and misuse of the technology have brought untold misery to the Hindu deities. Although fifty years back the pictures of the deities were mostly used for worshipping and a few were used in other areas, at present quite a large number of pictures of the deities are lavishly used in many areas.

Given below are the areas where pictures of Hindu Gods & Goddesses are used today: -

1. Packing materials - labels, wrappers, cardboard packets, plastic pouches, cardboard boxes, bottles, jars, tins and gunny bags etc.
2. Advertising materials - carry bags, pamphlets, posters, signboards, banners and hoardings etc.
3. Reading, Writing & Printing materials - receipts, cash memos, vouchers, tickets

- (lottery and transport), envelopes, marriage invitation cards, new year greeting cards, visiting cards, notebooks, registers, books, magazines and newspapers etc.
4. Decoration materials - ornaments, flags, headbands, stickers, posters (pictures), calendars, glazed tiles and wall/roof/door hangings etc.
 5. Others - ladies' hand bags, gents' side bags, T-shirts, trucks and buses, etc.

As such we shall discuss about the areas where the deities are neglected and dishonoured. Today the pictures of the most revered Hindu deities such as Krishna, Ganesh, Shiva, Durga, Laxmi, Hanuman, Kali, Rama, Vishnu, Saraswati, Kartikeya, Venkateshwara, Jagannath, Tara, Brahma and the incarnations of different deities are printed on the **packing materials** of a variety of consumer products as mentioned below:

1. Puja articles - Incense sticks, Vermilion, Sandal wood power, Camphor, Holy water of Ganga, Cotton wicks, Oil & *Ghee* for lamps, Coloured powder for *Rangoli* and *Hawan* items etc.
2. Food items - Rice, Wheat/Rice/Gram flour, Pulses, Mixed grains flour, Oil, *Ghee*, Cumin, Turmeric powder, Cardamom, Milk, Butter milk, *Paneer*, Candy, Sweets, Snacks, *Papad*, Vermicelli, Chowmin, Dates, Tamarind, Dried Amla, Betel nuts, *Betel masala* and Ayurvedic medicine etc.
3. Intoxicants - *Zarda*, *Khaini*, *Gudakhu*, *Gundi*, Bidis and *Bhang* (in the guise of Ayurvedic medicine) etc.
4. Cloth - Dhoti, Gamchha, Towel, Lungi and Blouse etc.
5. Other Products - Bangles, Candles, *Rakhis*, Fireworks, Silver leaves for sweets, Naphthalene, Lime, Red oxide, Terpene, Digital Toner, Chalk, Pencil, Pen, Lock, CD, Signal Light, Plastic Ropes, Necklace for children, Steel utensils and Brooms etc.

In fact, there may be more items which can be added to the above list and each item is being produced by quite a lot of companies. However, people purchase these products, utilize them and throw away their empty packets, bearing sacred pictures of the deities, just as they do with other empty packets. As a result pictures of the deities are found lying here and there on the road, in the garbage and in the open drains. People walk on them and vehicles run over them on the road, while the passersby spit and urinate on them at the garbage, though unknowingly. Dirty water flows over the beautiful faces of the deities in the drains. The empty bottles, tins and gunny bags, bearing the sacred pictures, are used in various ways unsuitable to the dignity of the deities. This is how Hindu deities, decorating the packing materials, are dishonoured. It was indeed shocking to find the label, pasted on the liquor bottle, contained the picture of Lord Jagannath, as telecasted in an Odia TV channel. It may be mentioned here that some Indian products, packed and sold abroad, also contain pictures of Hindu deities on their packets and bags.

DEITIES ON DISCARDED PACKING MATERIALS





DEITIES ON GUNNY BAGS



The pictures of Hindu deities are very often used by business establishments, socio-religious organizations and Governmental agencies on **advertising materials**. During festive occasions or even on normal days some shopkeepers use to handover plastic **carry bags** to customers, keeping the purchased articles inside them, on which the names and addresses of the shops along with pictures of deities are printed. After removing the purchased articles from the carry bags at home the customers either throw away these carry bags or reuse them till they are torn and then they are discarded. Some people even collect waste materials in them and throw them at the garbage or in the drains.

During different times of the year, one may come across torn and faded pictures of Hindu deities, placed on variety of **posters**, pasted on the walls of the towns. Some of these posters are advertisements, promoting commercial products while the others are advertisements, giving information about activities like spiritual discourses, devotional song programmes, *yajnas*, *kirtan*, *vigraha pratishtha*, exhibitions and fairs etc. After these posters are being pasted on the walls, the deities depicted on the posters are left to the mercy of their fate. The posters in general are exposed to weather while some are torn by street urchins. It is found that without giving any consideration to the pictures of the deities, many of the above mentioned posters are ruthlessly torn to pieces in order to give place to the new posters or new posters are pasted carelessly overlapping the pictures of the deities on old posters. It is indeed shocking to find at times dismembered figures of the deities on torn posters shivering in the wind and clinging desperately to the walls, being on the verge of falling down in the open drains just below the walls.

DEITIES ON POSTERS





It is a common sight to find unclean and faded pictures of different Hindu deities on the **signboards** of number of shops at the roadside. These deities are not so lucky like those deities who are staying inside temples and homes, where proper care is taken of them and they are worshipped time to time. The deities placed on the signboards are indeed a neglected lot who are left exposed to dust, smoke, sun, wind, rain and cold round the year. Hence they wear a pathetic look. Same is the condition of those deities placed on the flex **banners** and **hoardings**, hung at strategic places of the roadside and left uncared. They face the wrath of the nature and sometimes they are torn to pieces.

DEITIES ON SIGNBOARDS



DEITIES ON BANNERS



DEITIES ON HOARDINGS



During festive occasions some business establishments distribute **pamphlets**, bearing pictures of the deities, announcing 'Lucky draws' and attractive rebate on purchases, to the passersby. It appears as if the deities placed on the pamphlets are approving the offers of the shopkeepers. However the people after going through the pamphlets mostly throw them away as a result of which one can see a lot of discarded pamphlets lying scattered on the road and people walking on them. Similarly, during +2 examinations one may find pamphlets with pictures of deities like Ganesh and Saraswati lying scattered on the road near the school gates, which are distributed by different Coaching Centers, persuading students to join their tutorial classes to become successful in the Medical and Engineering Entrance Tests etc. Of course pamphlets of some religious, cultural and social institutions, distributed to people, also possess pictures of the deities. These pamphlets are also discarded after a few days, if not immediately.

Some **documents** are also found bearing pictures of the deities. The **cash memos** and **vouchers** of some business establishments bear pictures of the deities on them. So also **money receipts** of some socio-religious organizations, collecting donations, bear pictures of the deities. Generally people preserve such documents for a few days but later on they consider them as unwanted and discard them or tear and throw them ignoring the pictures of the deities on them.

The Durga Puja Committees in many places conduct Lotteries in order to raise their fund for gorgeous celebrations of Durga Puja. They sell **lottery tickets**, bearing beautiful pictures of the deities and promising fabulous prizes for the winners. On the day of the draw of the lottery, majority of losers use to tear their lottery tickets out of frustration, ignoring the pictures of the deities on them. As a result, one can see torn pieces of lottery tickets lying scattered on the spot where the result was announced. There are other lotteries, announcing big money in return of a small amount, which bear pictures of deities on them. Except the few winning tickets the rest are generally torn to pieces. Some **bus** and **ferry tickets** also contain pictures of the deities. These are torn and thrown at the end of the journey.

Another very serious matter is that most of the people throw away the **Marriage Invitation Cards**, prominently decorated with pictures of Lord Ganesh and other deities, once the ceremonies are over. As a result the pictures of the deities can be found lying here and there and the deities are dishonoured in the same way as those placed on packing materials. Indeed it is very unfortunate to see people discarding the same deity, Ganesh, whom they invoke before commencement of any auspicious event in order to ward off all the obstacles on the way. Incidentally the **Gift Envelopes**, bearing pictures of the deities, presented to the newlyweds, are also discarded carelessly after the cash gift is removed carefully from the envelopes. Sometimes one comes across discarded Invitation Cards for other auspicious occasions, **Diwali & New Year Greeting Cards** and **Visiting Cards**, bearing pictures of the deities, lying in the garbage or on the road.

DEITIES ON DISCARDED MARRIAGE INVITATION CARDS



It is not a surprise to find discarded old **Calendars**, having soiled or shabby pictures of the Hindu deities, in the garbage or on the road. Perhaps this is the simplest way chosen by some people to get rid of old calendars, which are of no use at the end of a year.

DEITIES ON DISCARDED CALENDARS



One may not believe, but this is true that the area where maximum number of pictures of Hindu Gods & Goddesses are printed and later on discarded is the **Indian Newspaper**. The Daily Newspapers, published in various languages of India including English, print uncountable number of pictures of the deities while performing the following activities:-

- a) Covering day-to-day incidents and giving extensive photographic coverage to religious ceremonies taking place round the year in the news reports
- b) Publishing literary and informative articles on Spiritualism, Tourism and Art & Culture
- c) Publishing commercial advertisements for promotion of consumer products and greetings of business establishments & political personalities

The gravity of the situation can be realized if we go into details of the above activities. As such each of the above mentioned activities is analyzed below separately.

News with Pictures of the Deities

The pictures of the deities, published along with the news, are either deliberate or accidental in nature. Given below are some circumstances under which pictures of the deities are placed on the pages of the newspapers:-

1. Placing pictures of the famous deities of different areas/districts on the strips, placed at the top of Local News pages of the newspapers as regular features
2. Placing pictures of the deities, worshipped on the day of publication of the newspapers, at the top of the front page beside/along with the name of the newspapers
3. Placing pictures of the deities on the strips, placed at the top of special pages during festive occasions

4. Placing pictures of the deities in news articles, related to festive occasions
5. Photographs of deities inside temples, along with news of theft of valuable ornaments of the deities from the temples or other incidents related to the deities
6. Idols of temples attacked, broken or burnt by antisocial
7. Discovery of idols from below the ground, from the river or from other places
8. Lighting the lamps before the idols or pictures of the deities, placed on the stage, by the chief guests during inauguration of cultural programmes
9. Dancers performing before the idols placed on the stage
10. Dance programmes on the stage before the deities, depicted on the banners, fixed at the backdrops
11. Distinguished guests seated at the daises on the stage before banners, depicting the deities
12. Renowned personalities being presented with idols or pictures of the deities as souvenirs or with certificates/citations, decorated with pictures of the deities on behalf of the organizers on the stage
13. Publishing paintings of the deities, prepared by the children
14. Publishing pictures of the deities as characters of cartoon films
15. Introducing new books, having pictures of the deities on their cover pages
16. Photographs of sights where *yajna* is performed or religious discourses are delivered on the stage, having banners at the back decorated with pictures of the deities
17. Photographs of indoor and outdoor art exhibitions, depicting the deities as subject matters of paintings and sculptures
18. Artists busy in painting traditional pictures of the deities or painting the idols during festive occasions
19. Artists giving demonstrations to students on idol-making or artists painting pictures of the deities in workshops
20. Construction of the idols of different deities in progress at the workshops of artists during festive occasions
21. Artists giving finishing touches to the idols at the workshops during festive occasions
22. Transportation of the idols from the workshops to home or to pandals by carrying physically or by vehicles during festive occasions
23. Worshipping of the idols on decorated pandals at different cities and towns
24. Reports on the largest idols and on idols, prepared using various materials
25. Politicians and film stars visiting the puja pandals
26. Devotional song programmes at the puja pandals
27. Members of Puja Committees, posing for group photographs, at the puja pandals with the deities at the background
28. Coverage of immersion ceremonies of the idols at different places
29. Idols being worshipped inside the temples on special occasions
30. Idols being taken out of the temples performing rituals, idols being taken in processions
31. Idols riding palkis/chariots/elephants/boats during festive occasions
32. Ceremonial decorations of the deities in the temples during specific religious occasions
33. Selling of idols at the shops/footpath during different pujas
34. Indoor photographs of persons in news, having pictures of the deities hung at the walls or idols kept at the corner of living rooms
35. Outdoor photographs, having idols in view in the surroundings etc.

Articles with Pictures of the Deities

There are several religious occasions of the Hindus when the pictures of different deities are published along with essays, stories and poems, written on the significance of the occasions, in the newspapers. The important religious occasions taking place during the year are given below:-

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Saraswati Puja | 10. Ganesh Puja |
| 2. Maha Shiva Ratri | 11. Vishwakarma Puja |
| 3. Holi | 12. Durga Puja |
| 4. Rama Navami | 13. Laxmi Puja |
| 5. Hanuman Jayanti | 14. Dhanwantari Puja |
| 6. Shiva-Parvati Vivah | 15. Kali Puja |
| 7. Sri Jagannath Rathayatra | 16. Deepawali |
| 8. Jhoolan Yatra | 17. Govardhan Puja |
| 9. Sri Krishna Janamastami | 18. Kartik Purnima |

There are many other religious occasions which are observed by the people and articles are published on them. Also informative articles are published, highlighting places of tourist interest, situated at different districts of the states, along with photographs of important temples and deities. Nevertheless, articles on artistic heritage of India appear time to time in newspapers along with pictures of paintings and sculptures, depicting various Hindu deities.

Advertisements & Greetings with Pictures of the Deities

During and prior to festive occasions of Durga puja, Diwali, Ganeshotsava, Maha Shiva Ratri, Janamastami and many other festivals, celebrated at national and regional levels, commercial advertisements and greetings accompanied by pictures/symbols of concerned deities overflow the pages of the newspapers for many days. Given below are the list of consumer products along with the list of the institutions and departments for the promotion of which the advertisements are given:-

1. Ornaments, Gold & Silver Coins, Watches, Clothes, *Sarees*, Dresses, Perfumes, Shoes and *Chappals*
2. Motorbikes, Cars, Jeeps, Tractors and Trucks
3. Pressure Cookers, Grinders, Refrigerators, Washing Machines, Air Conditioners, Generator sets and Auto clean Chimneys
4. CDs, Cameras, Cassettes, TVs, Mobile Phones, Computers, DVDs and Electronic Balances
5. Lands, Flats, Furniture, Ply wood and Cement
6. Films, Operas, FM Radios, TV Channels, Animation Films and Shopping Malls
7. *Rudrakshas*, Jewels, *Kavach*, *Yantra*, Miraculous Rings and Incense Sticks (These advertisements appear round the year)
8. Greeting Cards, *Panchangs*, Books, Magazines and Newspapers

9. *Zarda* and Food Products
10. Consultation with Astrologers, Lotteries and Stock Exchange
11. Private Colleges, Tutorial classes and Tour Operators
12. Indian Railways, Nationalized Banks, Information and Public Relation Department, Commissioner for Handicraft and Handloom Dept., Co-operative Societies and Electricity Distribution companies etc.

Also greetings by Business Establishments, Social Activists, Panchayat Presidents, MLAs, MPs and Political Activists appear in the newspapers along with pictures/symbols of the concerned deities of the religious occasions.

So after analyzing the activities of the newspapers in India, we can safely conclude that quite a large number of pictures of Hindu Gods & Goddesses are printed on the pages of the newspapers in a year. As per a statistical report published in Wikipedia, nearly 330 million newspapers were circulated daily in India in 2011, which is the largest in the world. It is almost impossible to keep a record of total number of pictures of the deities which are printed in all the newspapers of India in just one year. It is difficult to imagine the amount of pictures of the deities already printed in the newspapers of India till today. It appears, newspapers in India print more pictures of the deities than the packing materials of consumer products do in India.

Now let us see as to what exactly happens to the sacred pictures of the deities, printed in Indian newspapers. It is observed that people, without considering the pictures of the deities on the pages of newspapers, use old newspapers, even a day old, in the following manners :-

1. They are taken as a whole or torn into pieces in order to wrap and pack big or small objects in shops and other places
2. They are used to cover areas or objects in order to hide something on them
3. They are used like bed sheets to be spread on the ground or floor in order to sit or sleep on them
4. They are torn into pieces and used as plates to keep dry food on them to be eaten
5. They are used like wipers to clean dirty areas
6. They are used in collecting waste and are thrown at the garbage along with the waste
7. The rest of the newspapers left after use are sold as *raddi* which are further converted into paper packets to be used at the shops to pack things.

It is possible that a small portion of the old newspapers are used as raw materials for industries, but it does not mean honourable treatment to the deities, placed on the pages of newspapers. In fact, most of the old newspapers are discarded as waste after various uses. As a result the deities, once decorating the newspapers, find themselves lying helplessly on the road, at the garbage and in the drains and they face the same humiliating treatments as the deities, placed on the packing materials of consumer products, face at the end. It is true that the deities, placed on the pages of newspapers, are honoured just for one day. No one can give guarantee if the honour of these deities can remain intact the very next day of publication of the newspapers.

DEITIES ON DISCARDED NEWSPAPER PIECES



Deities Treated as Playthings

The Hindu Gods & Goddesses are not only dishonoured when their pictures are discarded or neglected, but also they are dishonoured when they are treated as playthings. Very often the idols and pictures of the deities are used in the way one likes as if they are playthings, causing irreparable damage to the dignity of the deities and making a mockery of their divinity.

- (1) It is common to find Lord Ganesh being portrayed in different characters in some of the puja pandals during **Ganeshotsava**. In the past Lord Ganesh has been depicted in his idols as a soldier holding a machine-gun, as a cricketer waving the bat, as a judge listening a case in the court, as a film star riding a motorbike and as a traffic police controlling the traffic - all complete with the required characteristic dress, uniform or costume suitable for the roles. Not only this, in order to make unique Ganesh idols various odd materials are used such as pieces of mirrors, matchsticks, shells, *rudrakshas*, pulses, seeds, coconuts, coins, buttons, bells, utensils, baskets, rice, *laddus* and *panipuris* etc. It seems people are taking Lord Ganesh in a casual manner and are playing with the dignity of the deity by representing him in distorted manner in the name of creativity, even overlooking the mentions in the Hindu religious texts. These distorted idols, being highlighted in the media, become crowd-pullers. As such the spiritual environment of the Ganeshotsava is diluted and an atmosphere of entertainment is created.
- (2) It is funny but serious that the workers of some political parties of India have

crossed all the limits of flattery as it appears from the **posters** prepared by them. In order to please their leaders they have gone to the extent of depicting them as all-powerful Hindu Gods & Goddesses in their posters. The workers of a particular political party have depicted their supreme leader as Goddess Durga, while their counterparts of another political party have depicted their top ranking leaders as Annapurna, Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar. These posters invited lots of reactions from the public. However, their leaders expressed their displeasure over these incidents. Actually the pictures of the deities, used in these posters, have their faces replaced by the faces of political leaders along with some additions and modifications by using modern techniques. This is a clear case of distortion of the pictures of Hindu Gods & Goddesses. It seems, these people do not have any fear or hesitation in doing whatever they like with the deities

- (3) There have been cases of disgraceful representations of Hindu deities in some **advertisements** and **greetings**. In an advertisement, which appeared in newspapers, a renowned watch company depicted Goddess Durga as holding ten pieces of wrist watches in her ten hands in place of her divine weapons, thus making a mockery of the deity. In a Diwali greeting, published by a leading English newspaper, the message 'The Triumph of Good over Evil' was depicted as Lord Rama, placed on the label of a half-opened match- box, was shooting a burning matchstick from his bow at demon Ravana, placed on the label of a firework. Here the dignity of Lord Rama has been lowered down by placing him on the label of a matchbox and by replacing his divine arrow with a mere matchstick. Also the very placing of Lord Rama on the label of a matchbox indirectly encourages the evil practice of placing Hindu deities on packing materials of consumer products. Yet in another advertisement, published on the cover page of a leading fortnightly, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, the captain of Indian Cricket Team, has been depicted in the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, holding eight commercial products in his eight hands out of which one is a shoe. Below him are the words 'God of Big Deals'. It is a clear case of insulting Lord Vishnu and this has hurt the sentiments of the Hindus. There have been protests in many places against this advertisement. A Hindu organization has filed a suit against Mr. Dhoni, the publisher, the printer and the editor of this fortnightly in a court at New Delhi. This is how people are playing with the dignity of Hindu Gods & Goddesses and are using the technical expertise in an irresponsible manner.
- (4) There is nothing new in taking Gods & Goddesses as subject matter of art. In the past the Hindu deities have been glorified in the traditional sculptures and paintings of India. But in the **modern paintings** of India, Hindu deities are very often represented in a disgraceful manner. Some modern artists in India deliberately distort the deities in their paintings in the name of freedom of expression, ignoring the religious sentiments of the Hindus. For these artists, mentions about the deities in the Hindu religious texts have little meaning. In the recent past there have been protests from Hindu organizations against obscene and distorted representations of Hindu deities by a renowned artist. In fact, nobody should be allowed to play with the dignity of Hindu deities in paintings. It should be remembered that enjoying freedom, without accepting social responsibilities, is nothing but autocracy.

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