

Planning a summer vacation? Keep an eye out for the three

## HINDU GODS SEATED IN THE GRAND CANYON \* \* \*

By William A. Noble



In his description entitled "The Grand Canyon of the Colorado River," Francios E. Matthes wrote: "Of all the geographic features of the United States that are famed for their scenic grandeur, the most extraordinary, the most truly unique, is the mile-deep canyon which the Colorado River has carved across the high plateaus of northwestern Arizona. The alpine mountain ranges of this country are equaled and excelled in height, if not in spectacular beauty, by those in other lands, but though there are elsewhere deep canyons, some of even greater depth than the Grand Canyon of the Colorado, there is not one that can match its vastness, its majesty, its ornate sculpture, and its wealth of color. Whoever stands upon the brink of the Grand Canyon beholds a spectacle unrivaled on this earth."

Those individuals with an interest in India will be excited to discover that three of the most spectacular remnant formations within the Grand Canyon National Park are named after the gods of the Hindu triad: Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva.

As erosion has proceeded within the great bend of the Colorado River, many erosional remnants have been left standing within the Grand Canyon. Because the northern and western rims within the bend are so much farther away from the river, there are more and larger features left there. The largest of these erosional remnants was

named "Shiva Temple" by Clarence E. Dutton, writer of the first major work on the Grand Canyon entitled *Tertiary History of the Grand Canyon District*, published in 1882.

The Shiva Temple and other similar remnants in the western United States are called *buttes*. Because viewers who look into the Grand Canyon are so overwhelmed by the stupendous vistas with their many features, some might find it hard to realize the Shiva Temple rises over five thousand feet above the places where the Crystal and Trinity canyons below it meet the inner gorge of the Colorado River. If the entire mass of the Shiva Temple could be moved onto equivalent terrain, its rise above would parallel the rise of Mount Washington above the nearby lowland of New Hampshire! The flat top of the Shiva Temple spreads over a mile, and the way its summit surface matches with terrain levels of the Kaibab Plateau offers proof that it was once but a small portion of a former high plateau level.

Dutton gave the name "Vishnu Temple" to another erosional remnant to the north of the Colorado River, and there are those who consider this feature to be the most spectacular in the Grand Canyon because of the way it stands as a towering spire.

A third erosional remnant was later named "Brahma Temple" in order to complete the towering triad

Dutton had - whether knowingly or unknowingly - founded. The Brahma Temple is also pointed at the top and is easily seen as a person looks northward across the Colorado River from Yaki Point on the south rim of the Grand Canyon. All three temples can be viewed together from Miners Spring.

The great majority of the millions of people visiting the Grand Canyon probably do not know the Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva temples even exist. Among the few individuals who do know about them, some might not have any idea about the nature of the deities. Their visits could be far more rewarding if they did know this. Reflection on these three gods, combined with feelings of oneness with nature, can lead - in the Hindu sense of bhakti or rejoicing - to the ecstasy of knowing that you are One with all creation.

Hinduism typically promotes myriads of ways for each person to be a pilgrim having the right and necessity to develop his or her own faith. Like the Christians with their God - the Holy Spirit - Hindus have their Brahman, their Atman, their Universal Spirit. The spirit of creation, which is all-pervading in the universe - which dwells within and everywhere without - is difficult to contemplate. A universal spirit of creation is virtually impossible to create in the image of humans, yet people still try to attribute this united spirit to individual gods.