

# Comparison of solar deities, specifically ra, surya, apollo

Religion



Solar Deities s Each and every ancient civilization had the tradition of sun worship, as sun appeared before life emerged on the planet and is considered the source of vitality for every being. Therefore, many ancient polytheistic religions worshipped the personified image of the sun, yet there are certain distinctions between solar deities of different cultures.

Comparing and contrasting such solar deities as Apollo, Ra and Surya, one could inevitably encounter certain common and distinctive features. All these gods were considered gods of the sun/sunlight in polytheistic religions and enjoyed much respect and honor and were depicted in the religious scriptures with their great deeds, relations with other deities and mortal people, myths and so on. However, they belong to different cultures: Apollo is a Greek god of Olympic period, Ra is a supreme solar deity of Old Kingdom period, and Surya is a Hindu deity referring to the sun (Gopal, 1990, p. 76) and embodying the so-called “supreme light”. All three deities are male and very powerful, but Ra is granted more power as the creator. Ra is believed to have created himself and to be the supreme deity in ancient Egyptian religion, while Apollo was born from Zeus and Leto and Surya is the son of Dyaus Pita and Aditi (both are sons of the supreme gods of the pantheons, yet some sects consider Surya the Supreme Deity). Both Apollo and Surya have siblings: Apollo’s antipode and the lunar deity is his twin sister Artemis, and Surya is considered one of seven brothers Adityas, the cosmic deities. One more distinction of Ra is the form of his portrayal: Surya and Apollo are entirely anthropomorphic deities depicted both in sculpture and in iconography as humanlike beings; while Ra has many guises and can be depicted as a calf, child, lion or a man with the head of a falcon.

The similarity to be highlighted between Apollo and Surya is their main attributes – both have chariots, yet Apollo’s one drawn by white swans and Surya’s chariot is horse-drawn (seven horses embodying sunrays or colors of rainbow). Ra, on the other hand, does not have such an attribute, having a sun disk, a scepter and uraeus, a serpent placed on his crown.

Ra and Apollo’s worship cults are characterized by certain centers of worship and places of origin. For Ra, the place of origin and the principal center of worship is Heliopolis, while Delphi is the center of Apollo’s cult, where the temple with his oracles was located.

The principal peculiarity of Surya in comparison to the other two deities lies in the religious system it belongs to. Obviously, ancient polytheistic religious traditions of Egypt and Greece languished long ago, being replaced by the new religions. However, Surya is the deity belonging to the religion that has survived till nowadays and thus is still relevant and alive. In post-Vedic period, Surya lost much of its significance and became one of the world’s guardians, but since the middle of the first millennium AD his worship cult revived and Surya regained his authority. His main task is to pour light upon the earth and lighten the world, eliminating darkness, diseases and enemies. In terms of diseases, there is a parallel to Apollo, whose wide array of tasks and “ occupations” includes healing (for instance, Apollo is believed to be the first to heal eye ailments).

Reference list:

Gopal, M. (1990). Gautam, K. S. (ed.) India through the ages. Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.