



Upadevatas or Minor Deities  
of the Hindu Pantheon - Part 1

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Hindu mythology talks about a plethora of Gods, assigning each one a certain level of divinity and duties for that particular level. There are supposedly about three hundred and thirty crore Gods in Hinduism. These deities are largely categorized as major Gods, such as [Vishnu](#), [Shiva](#), [Brahma](#), [Durga](#) and so on, and the not-so-major, "minor" deities, who have lesser functions to perform. In this set of two articles, published this month and the next, we learn about a few of these "lesser" Gods of Hinduism.

## Indra - the King of the Devas



### INDRA AND SHIBI

In Buddhist tradition, Indra is also called Sakra, the mighty one. Indra also features in Thai, Malay, Chinese and Japanese traditions.

Indra is the King of the Devas or Gods. He is also referred to as the Lord of Swargaloka or Heaven in Hindu mythology. Additionally, Indra is also considered the God of War, Storms, and Rainfall.

In the Rigveda, Indra is included as one of the major deities. Here, he is venerated as the one who killed the powerful demon, Vrittra. He is also central to the Soma sacrifice. Hence, he is hailed as vrsan the bull, and vrtrahan, slayer of Vrtra. Interestingly, Indra appears as the name of an arch-demon or "false God" in the Zoroastrian religion, whereas Verethragna emerges as a god of victory. But this similarity in concepts is now a matter of controversy, with no conclusive evidence to prove it either way.

According to the Puranas, Indra is actually portrayed as a hero, sometimes with an almost brash and amorous character. With the advent of the [Trimurti](#) (Trinity) concept in Hinduism, Indra's role diminished and his reputation went along with it.

## Origin of Indra as a deity

The Rig Veda states thus: "He under whose supreme control are horses, all chariots, the villages, and cattle; He who gave being to the Sun and Morning, who leads the waters, He, O men, is Indra".

Indra is considered one of the chief gods of the Rigveda, along with Varuna, Mitra, Agni and the Ashvins. Indra is said to delight in drinking Soma, the divine alcohol. He is most known for slaying Vrittra, liberating the rivers and smashing the Vala or a stone enclosure that the Panis used to imprison cows and Ushas or the dawn.

Indra is the God of War and was invoked by both the armies during the Battle of the Ten Kings. During the Vedic period, Indra emerged as the God of the Gods. The Brihad-aranyaka Upanishad, which came later, enumerates the gods as the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras, the twelve Adityas, Indra, and Prajapati. Here, Indra was the lord of the Vasus and was referred to as Vaasava.

By the Vedanta era, Indra came to be known as Manavendra or lord of men. Hence, Indra was now also referred to as Devendra or Indra of the Devas. However, the names, Sakra and Vasava were used exclusively for the original Indra.



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## Functions to be performed by Indra

Indra is the god of thunder and rain and also serves a symbol of valiance and strength. He leads the Devas and the five elements, such as Agni (Fire), Varuna (Water), Surya (Sun) and so on. He always wages war against the Asuras or demons residing in Patalaloka or the netherworld, in order to establish peace and dharma (righteousness). Indra thus fights the timeless battle between good and evil. It is believed that deceased warriors go to his hall after death, where they live without sadness, pain or fear. They watch the Apsaras and the Gandharvas sing and dance.

Indra is also regarded as one of the Guardians of the Directions - he represents the east. Indra has about 250 hymns dedicated to him in the Rigveda, more than those devoted to any other god and almost one fourth of the total number of hymns of the Rigveda.

## Physical appearance

As described in the Rig Veda, Indra, the solar god, is golden-bodied, with golden jaw, nails, hair, beard. One verse from the Atharva Veda says, "In Indra are set fast all forms of golden hue."

The Rig Veda further describes Indra as having dyed his hair a yellow colour with the yellow Soma juice.

Indra uses the Vajra or the thunderbolt as his main weapon. This is the weapon he used to kill Vrittra with. He is also shown to be using a bow, net and hook. Indra's vahana or vehicle is a gigantic, four-tusked white elephant called Airavata.

Whenever Indra is portrayed having four arms, he is shown with lances in two of his hands which resemble elephant goads. When he is shown to have two hands, he wields the Vajra and a bow.

Indra is the consort of Indrani and the father of Arjuna (by Kunti), Midhusa, Nilambara, Jayanta, Khamli, Rushabha and Rbhus. Indra is also the brother of Surya, the Sun God.

## Indra as a sort of "anti-deity"



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**KRISHNA LIFTS GOVARDHAN PARVAT TO PROTECT VILLAGERS FROM A TORRENTIAL STORM**

During the post-Vedic era, Indra is described with more negative characteristics and vices than any other Vedic deity. Modern Hindus, also tend to see Indra as minor deity in comparison to others in the Hindu pantheon. A Puranic story illustrating the subjugation of Indra's pride is illustrated in the story of Govardhanagiri incident in the [Krishna](#) avatar.

Indra was enraged that the local folk there adored and venerated Krishna as a God and had started ignoring him. Wanting to punish the people for this sin, Indra let loose heavy rains and storms on the little hamlet.

This created utter pandemonium and all the residents, animals and birds tried to seek shelter, in vain.

Little Krishna then saved all his devotees by lifting the Govardhana mountain with the little finger of his left hand. Everyone huddled up under the mountain and stayed that way till Indra finally relented and stopped the rain and thunderstorm.

In this incident, Indra is depicted as the clear loser of the battle of wits between himself and Krishna.

## Indra cursed by Gautama

Indra is always known for being on the lookout for beautiful damsels to woo and seduce. Once, he was passing by Sage Gautama's hermitage when he happened to spy the Rishi's lovely wife, Ahalya, working in the courtyard. Indra was totally taken in by her looks and wanted her for himself. But he realized she would never even look at him, if he appeared in his original form. So Indra hatched a plot to trap Ahalya.



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**RAMA RELEASING AHALYA FROM THE CURSE OF HER HUSBAND SAGE GAUTAMI**

Indra took Gautama's form and approached Ahalya. This way, he managed to seduce her and had his way with her. When Gautama realized what had happened, he punished Indra with a curse that one thousand phalluses would grotesquely cover his body and also that his reign as king of the gods would ultimately lead to the defeat of Devaloka.

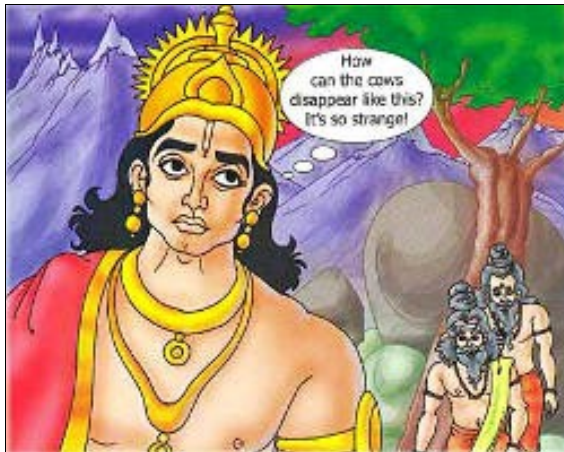
Upon Brahma's request, Gautama later reduced the curse and made it one thousand eyes instead. The Valmiki Ramayana, though, stated that the thousand-eyed Indra was cursed by Gautama to lose his testicles. The story goes that Indra later gets a new pair of testicles from a ram, with help from Agni or the God of Fire.

Due to this curse, Indra is constantly humiliated by demonic kings like [Ravana](#), whose son, Indrajit (whose name means victor over Indra), bound Indra by serpent nooses and

dragged him across the entire Lanka. Indrajit eventually released Indra at Brahma's behest, but that did not change the fact that Indra, had to accept Ravana's supremacy.

According to the legend of the Suchindram Temple, near Nagarkoil, in Southern Tamil Nadu, Indra was promised relief from the curse, if he simultaneously worshipped and pleased the Divine Trinity. This he succeeded in doing at Suchindrum, where the presiding deity is Sthanumalayan, a combined form of Shiva (Sthanu), Vishnu (Mal) and Brahma (Ayan), and was accordingly liberated from the ill-effects of the curse.

## Indra's tryst with the Ants



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**SHIVA AND BHASMASURA AND INDRA AND HIS COWS  
- (TALES OF GODS AND DEMONS FROM INDIAN  
MYTHOLOGY)**

According to the Brahmavaivarta Purana, after Indra defeats Vrittra and releases the waters, he asks [Vishwakarma](#) to build him a grand palace. Indra then arrogantly continues to demand more and more improvements for the palace. An exhausted Vishwakarma asks Brahma for help and Brahma in turn appeals to Lord Vishnu.

Vishnu visits Indra's palace in the guise of an ordinary brahmin boy and Indra immediately rushes to welcome him. Vishnu is all praise for Indra's palace, saying that none of the former Indras would have succeeded in building such a palace. Indra is amazed when Vishnu goes on to tell him about Indra's ancestors, the cosmic cycles of creation and destruction, and even the vast number of worlds scattered through space, each having its own Indra. The boy also claims to have

seen them all.

During the boy's speech, a collection of ants entered the hall. The boy saw the ants and laughed. Indra asks the boy why he laughed. The boy reveals that the ants are all former Indras.

Yet another visitor enters the hall. This is none other than Shiva, in the form of a hermit. On his chest lies a circular cluster of hairs, the circumference being filled completely, but with a gap in the middle. Shiva tells Indra that each of his chest hairs corresponds to the life of one Indra. Each time a hair falls, one Indra dies and another replaces him.

Humbled by all this, Indra loses his interest in materialism, rewards Vishwakarma and releases him from any further work on the palace. Indra himself decides to leave his life of luxury to become a hermit. Indra's wife Shuchi begs the priest Brihaspati to change her husband's mind. He teaches Indra to see the virtues of both the spiritual life and the worldly life.

## The Indradhanush

Irrespective of whether we love or hate Indra, he is still very much part of our modern life. The rainbow, for instance, is referred to as the Indradhanush. Dhanus, in Sanskrit, means bow. We all enjoy the sight of the Indradhanush, little realizing that we are also, in a sense, praising Indra, the God of rain and lightning!

## Goddess Gayatri Devi - the essence of the Vedas

[Gayatri](#) is the feminine form of gaayatra, a Sanskrit term meaning, "song or hymn". Devi Gayatri is a consort of Brahma. He married her when his first consort, [Devi Saraswati](#), was late for a yajna (sacrificial fire ritual), as she was spending time with some of her sakhis or friends. Brahma had to perforce start the yajna only with his wife and so, Brahma asked Indra to find him another girl. This is when Indra found Gayatri and Brahma married her.

Devi Gayatri is the personification of the Gayatri mantra and is revered by all Hindus worldwide. Gayatri is considered the Veda Mata or the mother of all Vedas. She is also considered the essence of the Parabrahman, or the Ultimate Reality. In fact, Gayatri is seen as the Brahman himself, in the feminine form. Some also consider her to be the mother of all Gods and the culmination of [Lakshmi](#), [Parvati](#) and Saraswati.

The Goddess is seen to combine all the attributes of Brahman, including Past, Present and Future, as also the three realms of existence. She is also adored as the Divine Trimurti combined as one. In Hinduism, Devi Gayatri is the only one who can withstand the brilliance of Aditya.

In Sanskrit, "Ga" means to sing, "Yatri" means Protection. Gayatri has three phases, called "Tripada". These phases constitute the Veda Mata, the Deva Mata (being a manifestation of divinity) and Vishwa Mata (the Mother of the Universe).



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**GODDESS GAYATRI SITTING ON A LOTUS**

### Physical characteristics



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**GAYATRI**

Devi Gayatri is usually portrayed as seated on a red lotus, signifying wealth and prosperity. Alternatively, she is also shown as seated on a swan or peacock. She appears as having five heads with the ten eyes looking in the eight directions - the earth and sky included. She also has ten arms holding all the weapons of Vishnu, symbolizing all her reincarnations. Gayatri is also sometimes accompanied by a white swan, holding a book to portray knowledge in one hand and a cure in the other.

Gayatri Devi is believed to be an incarnation of Saraswati, symbolising the Shakti, Knowledge, Purity and Virtue. While Saraswati is the Goddess of the Arts and learning, Gayatri Devi is the giver of the Four Vedas to mankind.

Devi Gayatri's five faces represent the pancha pranas and pancha vayus (five lives and five winds): prana, apana, vyana, udana and samana, of the five principles/elements (pancha tatwas) earth, water, air, fire and sky (prithvi, jala, vayu, teja and aakasha respectively). She

is shown having 10 hands, carrying the five weapons or ayudhas, namely, shankha, chakra, kamala, varada, abhaya, kasha, ankusha, ujjwala utensil and rudrakshi mala.

According to Hindu mythology, Gayatri, Savitri and Saraswati are three goddesses representing the presiding deities of the famous Gayatri mantra chanted thrice a day. Gayatri is the presiding deity of the Morning Prayer and rules over the Rigveda.

The Gayatri Mantra, rendered in Sanskrit, has a Vedic metre of 24 syllables. Amongst the

regulated poetry, the Gayatri mantra, chanted by properly qualified persons, is the most prominent and potent. The Gayatri mantra is the mantra that can even wipe out the greatest of sins. It goes as follows:

"Om bhoor bhuvah svaha  
Tat Savitur varenyam  
Bhargo devasya dheemahi  
Dheeyo yonah prachodayat"

The most basic translation of the above mantra is as follows:

The Protector and the basic fundamental force of all life, Who is self-existent; Who is free from pain and suffering; Whose very contact frees the soul from troubles; Who pervades the whole Universe and sustains it; the Creator and Energizer of the whole Universe; the Giver of happiness; Who is worthy of acceptance; Who is Pure and the Purifier of all; let us embrace that God, so that He may direct our mental faculties in the right direction and spiritually uplift us.

## The significance of the Gayatri mantra

The Gayatri mantra is considered to be the sonic incarnation of Brahman and is regarded as very important in Vedic civilization. Gayatri mantra is meant for God realization and the realization of the Self. It is also regarded as representing the Supreme Lord. Success in chanting it enables one to enter the transcendental position of the Lord. But, in order to chant the Gayatri mantra, it is considered necessary for one to first acquire the qualities of a balanced person in terms of spirituality.

Till very recently, it was believed that only the men folk, and that too, only the initiated ones, could chant the Gayatri mantra. But now, new age philosophy suggests that ladies too chant this mantra each day, in order to attain the Supreme Self.

Hindu Temples across the world periodically perform a Gayatri havan (homam) to propitiate the Lord. This Gayatri havan is considered to be most sacred and powerful as a purifying agent.

## Ganga - the Holy River

The [Ganga](#) or the Ganges, as it is known in English, is the largest river of the Indian subcontinent, flowing east through the Gangetic Plain of North India, going right into Bangladesh. The river, which covers 2,510kms, rises in the western Himalayas in Uttarakhand. Since time immemorial, the Ganga has been considered the holiest of all rivers by Hindus and worshiped as the personification of goddess Ganga.

The Ganga is also important historically. Many former provincial or imperial capitals, such as Patliputra, Allahabad, Murshidabad, Calcutta and so on, have been located on its banks. The Ganges Basin drains 1,000,000-square-kilometre and supports one of the world's highest density of humans. The river's average depth is 52 feet and the maximum depth, 100 feet. The Ganges has been declared as India's National River.



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**KURTA WITH GAYATRI MANTRA PRINT**

## The relevance of Ganga in Hinduism



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**GANGA**

In Hinduism, the river Ganga is considered most sacred. It is personified as a goddess in Hinduism, who holds an important place in the Hindu pantheon. Hindus believe that bathing in the river frees one of sins and helps in the attainment of liberation from the samsara sagara. Many Hindus travel from distant places to immerse the ashes of their kin in the waters of the Ganga - it is believed that doing this will help the deceased person will get easy entry into heaven. Even the famous celebrity, George Harrison (of The Beatles fame) had his ashes scattered in the Ganga by his family in a private ceremony soon after his death.

Several sacred places of worship lie along the banks of the river Ganga, including Haridwar, Allahabad and Varanasi. Even in Thailand, during the Loy Krathong festival, candlelit floats are released into waterways to honour the Buddha and the goddess Ganga. This is done as a prayer for washing away sins and also to bring good fortune.

## Birth of Goddess Ganga

There are varying records about the birth of Ganga. According to one version, the sacred water in Brahma's [Kamandalu](#) (little water-pot) became personified as a maiden, who became Ganga. According to another legend, Brahma had washed the feet of Vishnu and collected this water in his Kamandalu. Yet another version states that Ganga was the daughter of Himavan, king of the mountains, and his consort Mena; she was thus a sister of the goddess Parvati. In any case, each version says that Devi Ganga came from the heavens and was under the tutelage of Lord Brahma.

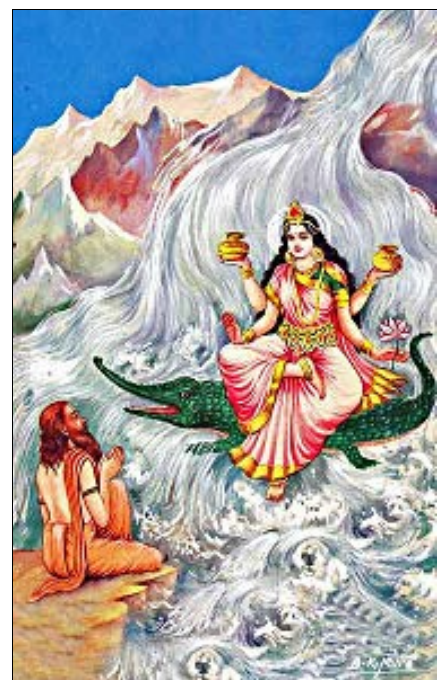
## Ganga descends to the Earth

There is a legend that the King Sagara had magically acquired sixty thousand sons. One day, the King performed a ritual of worship for the good of the kingdom. One of the integral parts of the ritual was a horse, which was stolen by the jealous Indra. Sagara sent all his sons to tour the entire earth and retrieve the horse.

The sons found the horse in Patala or the Netherworld, next to sage Kapila, who was deep in meditation. Believing that the sage stole the horse, they hurled insults at him and disturbed his penance. The enraged sage opened his eyes for the first time in several years, looked at the sons of Sagara and instantly burned them all to death.

Ever since the incident, the souls of the sons of Sagara wandered around as ghosts. When Rishi Bhagiratha, son of Dilip and one of the descendants of Sagara, learnt about his ancestors, he vowed to bring Ganga down to Earth so that her waters could cleanse their souls and release them to heaven.

Bhagiratha then prayed to Brahma that Ganga come



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**GANGA DESCENDS FROM HEAVEN**

down to Earth. Brahma agreed and ordered Ganga to visit the Earth. Ganga, with the fickle and playful nature she had, decided to sweep the whole earth away as she fell from the heavens. This alarmed Bhagiratha, who prayed to Shiva to control the force of Ganga's descent.

Ganga came sweeping down arrogantly and fell on Shiva's head. Shiva calmly trapped her in his matted hair, so that she could only be let out in small streams. Shiva's touch further sanctified Ganga. As Ganga travelled to Patala to release the pained souls, she also created a different stream to remain on Earth to help purify unfortunate souls there.

Ganga is the only river to follow from all the three worlds - Swarga (heaven), Prithvi (earth) and, Patala (Netherworld). She is thus called "Tripathaga", or the one who travels the three worlds.

Because Ganga came down to earth due to Bhagiratha's efforts, the river is also known as Bhagirathi. Interestingly, the term "Bhagirath prayatna" is used to describe valiant efforts or difficult achievements.

## **Ganga as Jahnavi**

Another name that Ganga is known by is Jahnavi. Once Ganga came down to earth, on her way to Bhagiratha, her rushing waters created turbulence and destroyed the sadhana (penance) of a sage called Jahnu. Angered by this, he drank up all of Ganga's waters. The Gods approached Jahnu and prayed to him to release Ganga, so that she could proceed on her mission. Jahnu at once released Ganga from his ears. Hence, Ganga has the name "Jahnavi" (daughter of Jahnu).

It is sometimes said that the river will finally dry up at the end of Kali Yuga (the current epoch of darkness and sin).

## **Other legends associated with Ganga**

According to the Skanda Purana, goddess Ganga is foster-mother to [Kartikeya](#) (Murugan), a son of Shiva and Parvati.

Parvati created an image of [Ganesha](#) out of the sandalwood paste on her body. This came to life after being immersed in the sacred waters of the Ganga. Therefore Ganesha is said to have two mothers, Parvati and Ganga. Hence, Ganapati is also called Dvaimaatura and also Gaangeya (the son of Ganga).

According to the Brahma Vaivarta Purana, Vishnu has three wives, who constantly quarrel with each other. Getting tired of the daily bickering, he keeps only Lakshmi, giving Ganga to Shiva and Saraswati to Brahma!



## Physical characteristics



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**GANGA WITH HER VAHANA - THE  
MAKARA**

The Brahma-Vaivarta Purana describes Devi Ganga thus:

"Sri Ganga Devi has a fair complexion. She is draped in white garments and ornaments adorn her body. Millions of moons shower their effulgence upon her, whose ever-youthful form smiles eternally. She is the beloved of Lord Vishnu and is forever endowed with good fortune. She removes everyone's sins and her feet grant liberation to all deserving souls. She is able to award one the Lotus Feet of Lord Vishnu, and thus she is known as Vishnu-Padi."

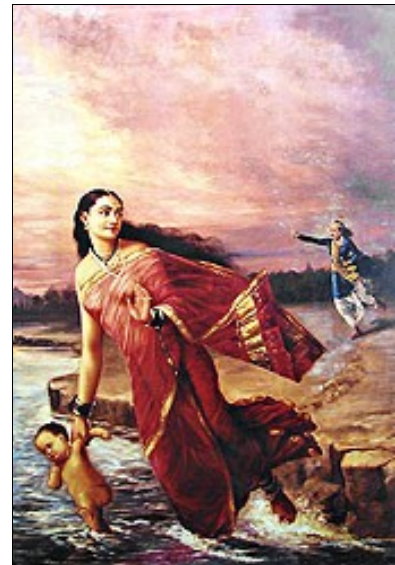
Ganga is often depicted with her divine vehicle, the Makara - an animal with the head of a crocodile and tail of a dolphin.

## Ganga in the Mahabharata

The Hindu epic, [Mahabharata](#), states that the Vasus, cursed by Rishi Vashishta, had requested Ganga to be their mother. Ganga incarnated and eventually married King Santanu, on condition that at he would, at no stage, question her actions. If he did so, she would immediately leave him.

The seven Vasus were reborn as their children. One after another, Ganga drowned them all in her own waters, freeing them from their punishment. Though Santanu was deeply disturbed by his wife's behaviour, he made no opposition. Only when the eighth was born did the king finally speak out against his wife, who left him thereafter.

The eighth son, Dyaus incarnated, remained alive, imprisoned in mortal form, and later became known in his mortal incarnation as Devavrata or Bhishma Pitamaha, who is one of the central and most respected characters of the Mahabharata.



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**KING SHANTANU TRYING TO STOP  
GANGA FROM DROWING THEIR  
CHILD**

## The Rama Ganga



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### **NISHAD, THE HUNTER KING HELPING RAMA LAKSHMANA AND SITA TO CROSS THE RIVER BY BOAT**

Ganga River is also said to be the river of Lord Rama and is called "Rama Ganga". It is believed that Lord Rama promised Ganga that when He appeared on earth as [Rama](#), he would reside on the banks of Ganga and her tributaries. Rama then manifested in Ayodhya, which is on the banks of Saryu Ganga River. On his way to Janakpuri, he crossed Ganga.

During his 14 years exile with his wife [Sita](#) and brother Lakshmana, he spend his first night at Tamsa River, a tributary of the Ganges. His second stay was at Shrungverpur, on the banks of Ganga. With the help of the Kevat he crossed the Ganga and

proceeded to Triveni sangam. After spending many years in Chitrakut, he left for Panchvati and stayed on the banks of Godavari until Sita was abducted by Ravana. The search of her, Rama went to Rameshwaram, which is the point where all the rivers meet the ocean.

In the Mahabharata, Lord Shiva explains the greatness of the 12 Jyotirlingas to Arjuna. Lord Shiva stated that any devotee who worships the Jyotirlinga in Rameshwaram with Gangajal (Ganga's waters), would immediately attain the moksha that even the Devatas could not.

## Festivals revolving around the Ganga

Some of the most important Hindu festivals and religious congregations take place in the vicinity of the Ganges. The Kumbh Mela, held every twelve years at Allahabad, is one such hugely sacred event.

Varanasi has hundreds of temples along the banks of the Ganga which often become flooded during the rains. This city, especially along the banks of the Ganga, is an important place of worship for Hindus.

## Pollution of the river Ganga

The Ganga has now been considered one of the dirtiest rivers in the world. This extreme pollution affects 400 million people who thrive on the banks of the river. The commercial exploitation of the river has risen in proportion to the rise of population. Carcasses of animals are often found floating in the already dirty, brown water. Hence, drinking and bathing in its waters carries a high risk of infection. While proposals have been made for curing this condition, little progress has been achieved.

However, the Ganga's reputation as a purifying agent appears to be a scientific fact. The river carries bacteriophages that vanquish bacteria and more. Also, bacteria producing dysentery and cholera are killed off at source, thereby preventing large-scale epidemics. Surprisingly, the river has an unusual ability to retain dissolved oxygen, the reason for which remains unexplained yet.

## Kamadeva - the God of Love

Kamadeva is the God of Love in Hindu mythology. The other names of Kamadeva include Kama (longing), Manmatha (churner of hearts), Manasija (he who is born of mind),

Kandarpa (inflamer of a god), Ratikanta (lord of Rati), Madana (intoxicating), Ragavrinta (stalk of passion), Ananga (incorporeal) and Pushpavaan or Pushpadhanva (one with bow of flowers). Kamadeva, the son of goddess Sri, is also the incarnation of Pradyumna, Krishna's son. The Rig Veda and Atharva Veda mostly talks about Kamadeva. He also features in some minor stories from the Puranas.

Incidentally, Kamadeva is one of the names used for Krishna. Kama, literary translated, means a wish, desire or longing, especially in the sensual or sexual context. The Rig Veda uses the name Kama for Lord Agni.

## Physical characteristics

Kamadeva is often portrayed as a young, handsome, winged man wielding a bow and arrows. His bow is made of sugarcane with a string of honeybees, and his arrows are decorated with five kinds of fragrant flowers. The five flowers are Ashoka tree flowers, white and blue lotus flowers, Mallika tree (Jasmine) and Mango tree flowers.

## Kama's birth

There are several versions about Kama's birth. Some say that Kamadeva arose from the mind of Brahma. Kamadeva is also depicted as being the dasa (servant) of Indra. Kamadeva married the indescribably beautiful Rati, who wields a discus and a lotus in her hands. Rati is a minor character in the story involving Kamadeva. Goddess Vasanta also accompanies Kamadeva, but unlike Rati whose very essence is desire, Vasanta emerges from a sigh of frustration. Interestingly, Kama often takes part in Puranic battles, accompanied by troops of soldiers.



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**KAMA DEVA - THE GOD OF LOVE**

## Kamadeva burned down by Shiva



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**LORD SHIVA BURNS DOWN KAMADEVA**

at Shiva and arouse passion in him. Though a bit sceptical about Shiva's reaction, Kama went ahead and created the right atmosphere around Shiva as he remained in meditation. He then aimed at Shiva and started shooting his Pushpabaana (flower arrows) at him.

Legend has it that after Sati took her own life at her father, Daksha's, yagna, her consort Shiva was totally bereaved and went into a deep penance. Fearing that the absence of Shiva would instigate the demons to release their dark forces on the heavens, the Devas implored to him to get married again and start leading a normal family life. But Shiva was not willing to even glance at any other female.

The Devas then approached Kamadeva to shoot arrows

Shiva was disturbed from his penance and this greatly enraged him. Opening his third eye, he looked at Kama and instantly burned him down to ashes. Rati, who was witness to the event, ran up to Shiva and tearfully implored him to give her husband back to her.

When Shiva learnt the reason behind Kama's actions, he relented and promised Rati that Kama would be born again and would also marry her in that birth.

## Kama's relationship with Krishna

Krishna is sometimes worshiped as Kamadeva in Gaudiya traditions, but according to Gaudiya Vaishnavism, Kamadeva was a part of Vasudeva Krishna after this deity was burned down by Shiva. In this form, Kamadeva is regarded as a demigod of the heavenly planets.

After being burned down, he had to get his body again. Thus, he was placed in the womb of Rukmini. It is believed that because he was begotten by Krishna himself, his qualities were similar to those of Krishna, such as his colour, appearance and attributes.

## Temples dedicated to Kamadeva

Though Kamadeva is not really worshipped in the form of an idol, there are some temples dedicated to him. They are:

- The Kameshwara Temple, in Aragalur, where Kamadeva supposedly roused Shiva from meditation.
- The Kameshwara Temple, in Kamyavan, one of the twelve forests of Vrindavan.
- The Harsat-Mata Temple at Abaneri, which has a unique representation of Kamadeva.

## Kubera - the God of Wealth

[Kubera](#) is the Lord of Wealth and the ruler of the semi-divine Yakshas. He is one of the Loka-pala and a Dik-pala or Guardian of the Directions, in the North. Kubera is usually depicted as an over-prosperous, fat man, adorned with ornaments and carrying a money-pot or money-bag and a club.

While the Vedic texts described Kubera as the chief of evil spirits, he acquired the status of a Deva only in the Puranas and after. He had once ruled Lanka, after which he was overthrown by his step-brother Ravana. Kubera then set up his rule in Alaka, in the Himalayas. Many scriptures talk about the glorious splendour of Kubera's city. Kubera is also mentioned in the [Buddhist](#) and [Jain](#) traditions. In Buddhism, he is known as Vaisravana, the patronymic of the Hindu Kubera and is also equated with Pancika, whose wife, Hariti, is an embodiment of wealth and prosperity.



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**KUBER - THE GOD OF WEALTH**

## Physical characteristics

Kubera is usually portrayed as a dwarf, with a fair complexion and big belly. He holds a mace, a pomegranate or money bag in his hand. He is sometimes said to have three legs, only eight teeth and one eye. He is also depicted riding an elephant; sometimes, even riding a man, due to which he is called a Nara-vaahana. The deformities described above only feature in the later Puranic texts. Kubera is also sometimes shown carrying a sheaf of jewels and a mongoose. In Tibet, the mongoose is considered as symbol of

Kubera's victory over Nagas, guardians of treasures.

The gada or mace is a symbol of dandaniti or administration of justice and a shakti (power) in his left pair represents artha. The shibika or club is the weapon of Kubera. The nidhi or treasures, Padma and Shankha, stand beside him in human forms.

Some Jain depictions show Kubera as a drunkard, signified with the nectar vessel in his hand. In Jainism, he is sometimes shown having four faces, rainbow colours and eight arms. The Digambara sect of Jainism, on the other hand, gives him 6 weapons and three heads; while Svetambaras portray him with 4-6 arms, numerous choices of weapons. His attribute of holding a bag of wealth, though, remains constant in all these cultures.

The Mahabharata describes Kubera as the son of Prajapati Pulastya and his wife Idivida. Kubera is also sometimes described as born through a cow.

## Kubera in the Puranas



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**KUBER AND KUBER YANTRA**

The Vishnudharmottara Purana describes Kubera as the embodiment of both Artha (wealth, prosperity and glory) and Arthashastras (treatises related to it). Kubera's complexion is described as that of lotus leaves. His left eye is said to be yellow in colour. He wears a armour and necklace which comes right up to his large belly. His face is inclined to the left, sporting a beard and moustache and with two small tusks protruding from the ends of his mouth, representing his powers to both punish and to bestow favours.

Kubera's wife, Riddhi, represents the journey of life. She is usually shown seated on his left lap, with her right hand holding a ratna-patra (pot of jewels). There are also reports of Kubera marrying the Yakshi, Bhadra.

## Various names of Kubera

Kubera is called Vaisravana as he is born to Vishrava. As the son of Ilavila, he is also called Ailavila. Kubera once looked at Shiva and Parvati with jealousy and lost one of his eyes. Parvati deemed that this eye become yellow. Hence, Kubera gained the name Ekaakshipingala. He is also called Bhutesha or the Lord of the Spirits.

Other names of Kubera include Rajaraja, Dhanadhipati, Dhanada, Yaksharajan, Rakshasadhipati, Guhyakadhipa, Kinnararaja, Mayuraja and Nararaja.

## Kubera in the epics

The [Ramayana](#) and the Mahabharata give Kubera the status of Godhood. Brahma conferred upon Kubera the Nidhis and the Pushpaka Vimana, a flying chariot. According to the Mahabharata, Brahma conferred upon Kubera Lordship of Wealth, friendship with Shiva, status as world-protector, a son called Nalakubera and Lordship of the Nairrata demons.

Ravana, after acquiring a boon of Brahma, overthrew Kubera from Lanka and seized his Pushpaka Vimana, which was returned to Kubera after Ravana died. Later, in Alaka, Kubera had a grove called Chaitraratha, where leaves were jewels and the fruits were

apsaras from heaven.

The Meghaduta as well as the Mahabharata describe the magnificence of Kubera's residence, where the Gandharvas and Apsaras entertained him. It is recorded that Alaka was plundered once by Ravana and attacked once by Bhima.

### **Vishnu as Kubera's debtor**

Kubera is known to have lent money to Vishnu for his marriage with Padmavati. In remembrance of this, devotees going to Tirupati donate money in Venkateshwara's Hundi, so that he can pay back Kubera. It is said that this will go on till the end of the present Kali Yuga.

### **Worship of Kubera**

Kubera is worshipped along with Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, on Diwali day and on Dhanteras, which are primarily dedicated to her worship.

### **Varuna - the God of the Oceans**

According to the Vedic religion, Varuna is the god of the sky, of water and the celestial ocean. He is also regarded as a god of law and of the Netherworld as well. He is one of the most central Devas in the Rigveda. Varuna, the Ruler of the heavens and the earth, continued his dominion over all forms of the water element, particularly the oceans, way into later Hinduism as well.

### **Role of Varuna in Hinduism**

Varuna and Mitra are the gods of the oath, often identified as a dwanda or pair; as Mitra-Varuna. Varuna is also twinned with Indra in the Rigveda, as Indra-Varuna.

As the chief of the Adityas, Varuna has several aspects of a solar deity. But as opposed to Mitra, he is associated with darkness and the night, and Mitra with daylight. Though a prominent Asura deity, Varuna is concerned with moral and societal affairs of the land. Together with Mitra, Varuna is regarded the keeper of law and order.

As the Lord of the Skies, Varuna may either correspond to, or rule over, the dark half of the sky, or celestial ocean. Hence, he is also considered the God of Rain. According to the Atharvaveda, Varuna is omniscient. He is adept at catching liars by his snares. The stars are his thousand-eyed spies, watching every movement of men.

According to the Rigveda, Indra features much more prominently than Varuna. This misrepresents the actual importance of Varuna in early Vedic society due to the focus of the Rigveda on fire rituals and Soma. Considering his omniscience and omnipotence in the affairs of men, Varuna indeed has many qualities a supreme deity. The daily Sandhyavandanam ritual of a dvija, for instance, addresses this aspect of Varuna, requesting him to forgive all sins. Indra does not get mentioned at all here.

It is believed that Varuna, being the Lord of the Oceans, is also the keeper of the souls of the drowned. Seen from this angle, Varuna is also a God of the Dead, and has powers to



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**VARUN DEVA**

grant immortality. From the name Varuna comes the name Varun, which means wind. He is attended by the nagas or snakes. He is also one of the Guardians of the Directions and represents the West.

Later art depicts Varuna as a lunar deity, as a yellow being wearing a golden armor and holding a snake noose. He also rides the Makara, the sea monster.

## Varuna in the Ramayana



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**HANUMAN AND THE VANARA SENA BUILD A BRIDGE OF ROCKS ACROSS THE SEA TO LANKA**

While wanting to cross the mighty ocean to Lanka, to retrieve Sita from Ravana's clutches, Rama performs tapas (penance) to Varuna, fasting and meditating for three days and three nights. Varuna does not respond, and Rama arises on the fourth morning, enraged by the God's arrogance. With his bow and arrow, Rama angrily attacks the oceans with celestial weapons, thereby burning up the waters and killing all the ocean's creatures. The Vanara Sena (Army of Monkeys) is amazed and fearful at Rama's rage as he goes about demolishing the oceans. Lakshmana prays to calm Rama's mind. Just as Rama invokes the brahmastra, considered the most powerful weapon capable of destroying all creation, Varuna arises out of the oceans. Bowing before Rama, he begs him not to destroy the oceans with the astra (arrow). He also asks Rama to redirect the weapon at a demonic race that lives in the heart of the ocean.

Rama agrees to do so and his arrows destroy the demons, thereby establishing a trouble-free environment underwater. Varuna promises that he would keep the oceans still for all of Rama's army to pass, and Nala constructs the Ramasetu (Rama's bridge) across to Lanka.

## Varuna and Uranus

Varuna is sometimes likened to the Greek God, Uranus, because of the extreme similarity between the two deities. Uranus is associated with the night sky as his name literally means "Sky". Varuna is a god of the sky and the celestial ocean or the Ksheera Sagara.

Lakshmi is said to have arisen from the ocean of milk and therefore be the daughter of Varuna. Similarly, Aphrodite is said to have been born from the falling of the testicles of Uranus in the ocean after his castration. Both Lakshmi and Aphrodite are associated with the planet Venus. This shared nature of the two deities also leads to their identity being linked together.

Of course, this likeness is also a matter of controversy among many schools of thought today, as there is no convincing evidence to prove the same.

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This article was written by **Saipriya Viswanathan**. Saipriya is a teacher/performer of Bharata Natyam, Carnatic vocal music and Carnatic Veena. She is a recipient of several awards for both dance and music, including the Sur Mani and Singar Mani titles. She is a recipient Govt. of India Merit Scholarship for dance and is a diploma holder in Carnatic vocal music.

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