



## Newsletter Archives

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### Ayyappan, Ganesha, Murugan The Three Sons of Shiva

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Lord Shiva, one of the Trimurti or the Divine Trinity, also known as Rudra, is one of the most major deities in the Hindu Pantheon. According to the Shaiva cult, Shiva is considered to be the Supreme Being. According to the Smartas, Shiva is revered as one among the five primary forms of God.

Except in temples like Chidambaram - where Shiva is worshipped as the Dancing Lord Nataraja, stepping over the demon Apasmara, who stands for ignorance - Shiva is usually portrayed and worshipped in the form of the Shiva linga. Sometimes, he is also depicted as being in deep meditation.

According to Hindu culture, Brahma and Vishnu are the other two deities of the Trinity. Here, Brahma plays the role of the Creator, Vishnu is the preserver and maintains the Universe, and Shiva is the destroyer. Shiva is also the dynamic force that transforms. Together, therefore, the Trinity works to maintain the aspects of Srishti, Sthithi and Laya.



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**SHIVA LINGA**

### Other names of Shiva

The word Shiva comes from Sanskrit and means, "The Auspicious One". It also means kind, pure, generous and gracious. Interestingly, in the Rig Veda, the Lord of the Devas, Indra, uses this word to describe himself! The name, Shiva, could also be used to mean one who is shorn of the three Gunas, namely, Satva, Rajas and Tamas; and also one who purifies all by the mere chanting of His name. Swami Shri Chinmayananda, states in his translation of the Vishnu sahasranama: "Shiva means 'the One who is eternally pure' or 'the One who can never have any contamination of the imperfection of Rajas and Tamas'". Dravidian tradition gives the meaning "to be red", to the word Shiva. This may be the equivalent of Rudra, or "The Red". Shiva is worshipped as a major deity not only in India, but also in Sri Lanka and Nepal.

## Physical attributes of Shiva



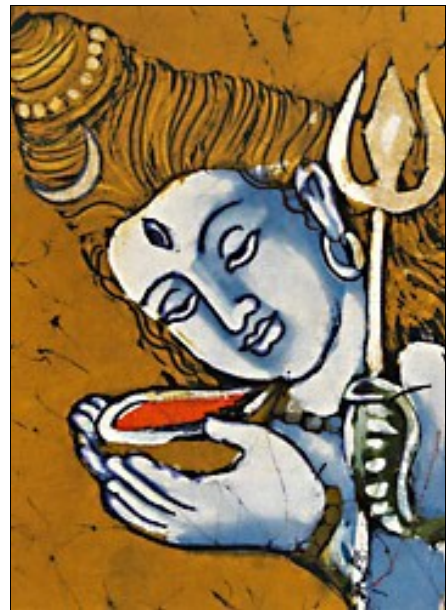
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**LORD SHIVA**

Shiva is often shown as a three-eyed deity, residing in the cold and hostile environs of Mount Kailas. He is portrayed with a crescent moon (Chandrashekhara) and Devi Ganga (hence his other name is Gangadhara) on his head. His hair is matted and he is adorned with snake and skull ornaments. He is also covered with ashes and holds a Damaru (small drum) and Trishula (Trident).

Shiva is said to have burnt down Kama (the God of Love) with his third eye, when the latter tried to disturb him during penance. Some scriptures indicate that Shiva got his name, Tryambakam, from this attribute of his third eye. But this is still a controversial matter.

Shiva is also known as the Neelakantha, the one with the Blue Throat. During the time of the Samudra Manthan (churning of the Ocean of Milk), there emerged from the water the deadly poison, Halahala. The Devas realized that such was the potency of the poison, that even a drop of it falling on the Earth could cause the destruction of the entire planet. Shiva immediately stepped ahead, took the poison in his palms and drank it up before it could touch the ground. Fearing what might happen to her Lord if the poison entered his body, Parvati, Shiva's consort, gripped his throat, so as to stop Halahala's downward movement. This resulted in Shiva's throat becoming blue.



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**NEELKANTHA**

The Ganga, whose powerful descent Shiva bore on his head, flows in a gentle stream from his matted hair. Shiva is often shown as being draped in tiger skin, as also sitting on tiger skin during penance. The Lord is many times also shown to be seated on Nandi, his Divine Bull. Hence, he also has the name, Nandikeshwara and Pashupati.



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**GANESHA, AYYAPPAN AND Murugan - SONS OF SHIVA**

Ayyappan or Shasta.

Shiva is depicted in many moods, of which the Mahakala form is the most feared. This aspect of the deity destroys all in sight and dances his dance of death. He is also portrayed as a Yogi (ascetic), Teacher (Dakshinamurthy), Mrityunjaya, Ardhanareeshwara, Tripurantaka (slayer of the demon Tripura), Panchabrahman (one with the five faces of Satyojata, Vamaka, Eeshaana, Tathpurusha and Aghora), Householder, Consort of Parvati (Umapati) and father of Ganesha and Skanda (or Murugan). While Shiva has these two sons from Parvati, he also has one additional son from Mohini (Vishnu's female avatar), named

## Shiva's relationship with Vishnu

Though the Shaivait and Vaishnavite sects each claimed that their Lords were the Supreme deity, both the deities were viewed as one in the Bhagavata Purana. While Shiva was considered a manifestation of Vishnu, there is also a legend where Brahma and Vishnu have been revealed to be emanations from Maheshwara himself.

There are also many stories in Hindu mythology that show both Shiva and Vishnu fighting the evil forces together and even coming together in combined forms, one of them which is called the Harirudra.

## The Samudra Manthan episode

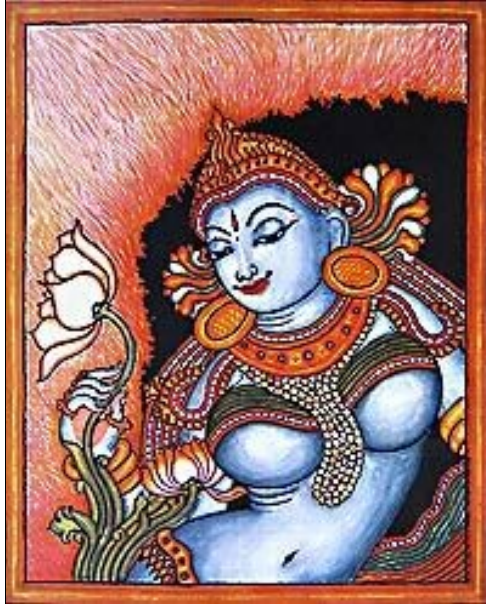
One such story is that of Mohini. During the Samudra Manthan (churning of the Milky Ocean) episode, Vishnu takes the form of the seductively beautiful Mohini, in order to prevent the Asuras (demons) getting their hands on the Devamrita (Nectar of Immortality). The Asuras had been called by the Devas to take part in the churning of the ocean, as they would have a lot more energy and vigour than the already weak and emaciated Devas to complete the task. But they knew that if the nectar was consumed by the demons, they would achieve immortality and then wreak havoc on the entire Universe. This, then, had to be prevented in some way.



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**SAMUDRA MANTHAN**





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**MOHINI**

Vishnu hears of the Devas' predicament and offers to help them regain the Amrita. He takes the form of Mohini and walks up to the demons, who are completely enchanted by her beauty and sensuality. She entices them, saying that she would be glad to serve the Devamrita to them if they would let her have the urn filled with the potion. They gladly accede to her request. Mohini makes the Devas and Asuras sit in rows, opposite to each other. She serves the Devas first and then proceeds to feign disappointment that the Amrita got over before she could feed the Asuras. In this way, Mohini prevents the demons from consuming the Devamrita.

### **Mohini and Bhasmasura**

Though this was the main mission of Mohini, she also played a major role in other episodes, such as the Bhasmasura incident, where she subdues and slays the demon who had the ability to reduce to ashes anyone he laid his hands on. Realising his powers, Bhasmasura becomes even more ferocious and proceeds to attack Devaloka. Fearing this demon's mighty powers, all the Devas assembled at Vaikuntha and requested Vishnu to help them out of this situation. Vishnu again assumes the form of Mohini and approaches the asura. Seeing her beauty and charm, the demon falls in love with her and proposes marriage to her.

Mohini promises to accede to his request, provided that the asura dances with her and is able to match each of her steps with his own. Both dance together for some time, after which she strikes a pose, keeping her hand on her head. Without thinking, Bhasmasura also places his palm on his head, thereby reducing himself to ashes and destroying himself!

## Lord Ayyappan

### Taming Mahishi - the birth of Lord Ayyappan

Mahishi, the asura princess, was very angry with the Devas after Devi Durga destroyed her beloved brother, Mahishasura. Hence, Mahishi began a fearful penance to appease Brahma, who granted her a boon of being invulnerable to anyone except the combined strength of Shiva and Vishnu. Drunk in this power, Mahishi began her dictatorial rule over the whole world.

The gods requested Shiva and Vishnu to come up with a solution to this problem. This is when Vishnu decided to assume the form of Mohini yet again, so as to procreate with Shiva. Vishnu explains the entire matter to Shiva and the latter requests to give him a glimpse of Mohini's form. Shiva is overcome with passion on seeing "her" form and unites with her. Lord Ayyappan is born from this union of Hari and Hara.

Ayyappan combines the strength of both Vishnu and Shiva and hence, is invincible. Lord Vishnu gifts the new-born infant with a small bell necklace and hence this deity is also hailed as Manikanthan Swamy. In Tamil Nadu, Shasta is also called Ayyanar or Shasthappan. While in Tamil Nadu, the legend ends with the birth of the god, the story in Kerala continues with Ayyappan's adoption by the Pandalam Raja, and his fulfilling the mission of destroying Mahishi.

Shasta's other names include Dharmasasta, Hariharasutan, Sathanar, Sastan, Cattan, Ayyanar, Natrayan, Nattarasan, Bhutanathan, Pandala Raja, Kumararaja, Ariyan, Hariharanputhran and PampaVaasan.

### Ayyappan's childhood



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**AYYAPPAN**



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**DURGA - SLAYER OF MAHISHASURA**

Lord Ayyappan was adopted by the King of Pandalam, a district in Kerala. Raja Rajasekhara was the ruler Pandalam at the time. The Raja heard a child wailing on the banks of the River Pampa when he was on a hunting expedition. Puzzled, he moved in the direction of the voice to find a beautiful infant there. The resplendent baby lay there with a gemstone bell tied around his neck. The king had no children and so, was thrilled by the sight of this lovely but abandoned child. He was an ardent devotee of Lord Shiva and his queen was a devotee of Lord Vishnu. They had prayed long to their deities to bless them with a child. Now, the King accepted the child as God's response to their prayers for an heir to the throne.

Manikantan was given the right kind of education and grew into a handsome boy, well versed in academics and martial arts such as Kalaripayattu, then the common tradition in Kerala. The Cheerappanchira Kalari at Muhamma, in Alappuzha District thoroughly trained

him in the martial arts.

In the meantime, the Rani too gave birth to a son. But the king still regarded Manikantan as his elder son and hence, decided to crown him as the Yuvaraja (heir).

The King's minister was always against Manikantan becoming the heir to the throne, so he, along with his cronies, manipulated the Rani and asked her to fight the king's decision. On Manikantan's coronation day, the queen pretended to suffer from tremendous stomach ache. As planned, a fake practitioner was called in and prescribed "the milk of a tigress" as the cure of the queen's illness. As no one else dared to come forward to complete the task, Manikantan himself volunteered and went to the forest in search of tigress milk. The king tried in vain to stop him and was constantly praying for his safety, hoping he would come back alive.

### **Manikantan returns victorious**

Manikantan enters the forest, comes face-to-face with the terrible demoness Mahishi and slays her almost effortlessly. In doing this, he also releases a beautiful woman who had been cursed to become Mahishi. This young lass asks Ayyappan for his hand in marriage, but he declines, as he has vowed to be a celibate. However, he gives her his word that she would be housed right next to his temple and would be visited by pilgrims. He also said that he would marry her if the number of new pilgrims stopped. Now, that young lady is worshiped as Maalikapurathamma. Some versions of the story say that Maalikapurathamma was a young girl in Cheerappanchira family where Ayyappan was trained for Kalari.

Manikantan then enters the palace riding the very tigress, followed by her cubs. The minister, convinced of Ayyappan's divinity, confesses to his plot and prays to him for salvation and the wellbeing of the kingdom. Manikantan disappeared forthwith, but since the king refused to eat anything if Manikantan did not come back, he gave his foster father one more Darshan before ultimately leaving.

Ayyappan embraced the King, thereby granting him Moksha (salvation). The king requested the Lord to allow him to build a temple for him. The Lord then shot an arrow that fell at the peak of Sabarimala and asked the King to construct the temple there. Ayyappan also explained how the Sabarimala pilgrimage shall be undertaken, emphasizing the importance of Penance Vratams (austerities) and what the devotees can attain by His Darshan. The sacred Sabarimala shrine now lies north of the holy river Pampa.



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**AYYAPPAN TAMES THE TIGRESS**

### **Annual miracle at Sabarimala**

The Lord also promised that on the day of the Thai Pongal, that is, January 14 every year, he would manifest and give all darshan as the Makara Jyoti, a bright flame emerging in the sky, just above the mountainous region. On this day, all of Ayyappan's Tiruvaabharanam (personal jewellery) is taken from the palace and transported to the shrine, by an emissary travelling on foot. A detailed puja and aarti is performed before taking the jewels from the palace.



Immediately after the aarti, the Krishnaparintha or an eagle flies overhead, almost as if it was instructed to do so. It circles around above and follows the devotees all the way to the shrine. This also serves as a cue to the temple authorities to make preparations to adorn the deity. This journey is undertaken on the 12th and 13th of January and reaches Sabarimala on January 14. There is an Aarti immediately after adorning the Lord with the jewellery.

Here too, the Lord shows his devotees a miracle. Just as the Arti concludes, the Makara Jyoti appears on the east side of the Temple, up above the Hills of Kanthamalai. The light appears almost instantly after the aarti and never fails to thrill the millions of devotees who have gathered on the opposite side to get a darshan of the Lord in His Effulgent Form!

## Offering of Naivedyam and Prasadam

Ayyappan is offered Appam and Aravana Payasam as Naivedyam (ritual offering). One other prasadam offered by the temple to the devotees is the Rthumathikanji, a kind of porridge made with one measure rice and five measures of jiggery. It is believed that Malikappurattamma one day offered this to Manikantan, who liked it very much. Thereafter, he requested her to prepare it for him everyday. Now, it is treated as a holy Prasadam for the devotees.

## Pilgrimage to Sabarimala

The Sabarimala temple, inaugurated by Lord Parasurama (one of the ten avatars of Vishnu), is quite small, with 18 steps constructed above the ground, each representing a desire one must conquer in one's life. These steps have now been coated in gold. The original idol was made of wood. Devotees commonly chant, "Swamiye Sharanam Ayyappa".

The pilgrimage to Sabarimala commences from the first day of Vrichikam, a Malayalam month, coming in the middle of November. The Makarasankranti Day is the most vital and is the first day of the Makara month. It falls between January 14 and 16. Devotees, having undertaken 41 days of Vratham, throng the temple on this day. It is believed that a devotee who does this will attain Moksha. Ayyappan is referred to as Kaliyugavaradan for this very reason, as he grants liberation during this difficult epoch of Kaliyuga.

## The Vratam



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**RUDRAKSHA MALA**

Devotees undertaking the Vratam before undertaking the Sabarimala pilgrimage have to observe severe austerities. They initiate the Vratam by wearing a Tulasi (sage) or Rudraksha necklace. The male and the female pilgrims are addressed as ayyapan and Maalikapuram respectively. The devotees must practice simple living and total cleanliness and hygiene. He also abstains from alcohol, tobacco and non-vegetarian food. Personal adornments, hair cutting and shaving are forbidden.

The devotee additionally wears black/blue/saffron clothes and is expected to pray daily, both in the mornings and evenings. The vratam continues till the pilgrim returns from his pilgrimage to Sabarimala and removes his `mala' after breaking a coconut and offering prayers.

The Vratam has to be undertaken after getting permission from parents and the Guruswamy or the Periyaswamy. After this the date is fixed to commence the vritham. The previous day before the said date one has to offer prayers to one's family deity and make a holy knot with yellow cloth with 1.25 currency units within and present it to the family deity, thereby taking Her/His permission to commence the vritham.

## Lord Ganesha

The Elephant-headed Lord, Ganesha, also known as Ganpati, Vighneshwara, Vinayaka and Pillaiyar, is one of the most popular deities in the Hindu pantheon. His image is found throughout India and Nepal and extends to Jains and Buddhists, even to other regions beyond India. Ganesha is generally regarded as the Remover of Obstacles and the Lord of Beginnings and Lord of Obstacles, also the Patron of arts and sciences and the Lord of Buddhi and Siddhi (intellect and wisdom). As Vighneshwara, He is offered obeisance at the beginning of rituals and ceremonies and invoked as Patron of Letters. Ganesha emerged a distinct deity during the 4th and 5th centuries CE, during the Gupta Period. Today, Ganesha is one of the primary Gods in Hinduism.

The name, Ganesha or Ganapati, is a combination of the Sanskrit words, Gana (group of Ganas or Shiva's attendants) and Isha or Pati (Lord/Master). The Amarakosha, an early Sanskrit glossary, lists eight synonyms of Ganesha : Vinayaka, Vighnarāja, Dvaimātura (one who has two mothers), Gaṇādhipa (same as Ganapati), Ekadanta (one who has one tusk), Heramba, Lambodara (one who has a pot belly), and Gajanana (having the face of an elephant).

Ganesha is a very versatile deity, who is portrayed in many ways. He may be depicted sitting, reclining, standing, dancing, playing with his family, or engaging in a range of contemporary situations. Some recent fancy Ganesha idols available in the market today, even show him in coat and suit, with a mobile phone in hand!

## Physical attributes of Ganesha

Ganesha has the head of an elephant and a big belly. He has four arms and a broken tusk. His trunk turns to his left or right, depending on the region where the idol was made. Generally, Ganesha typically holds an axe or a goad in one upper arm and a noose in the other upper arm. The lower right hand shows the viewer a gesture of protection or fearlessness (abhaya mudra), while the lower left hand holds a sweet modak. Ganesha's vahana (vehicle) is the Mushika (rat) and is often shown as being seated at His feet.

The Ganesha Purana shows the Lord wrapping the serpent King, Vasuki, around his neck or even stomach. Other depictions include him with a yagnopavita (sacred thread), holding the Trisula (Trident) in one hand and seated on a throne. Upon Ganesha's forehead is sometimes shown a third eye or the traditional Shaivite Tilak, which consists of three horizontal lines of Vibhuti. The Ganesha Purana also talks about Ganesha with a crescent moon on the forehead - this form is called the Balachandra.



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**LORD GANESHA**



## Significance of Ganesha's Vahana, the Mushika



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**GANESHA WITH MUSHIKA**

The Mushika or the rat is a stealthy animal, which is forever running around, causing a general nuisance to one and all around. The mushika signifies our stealthy mind, which is always looking for a crooked way out of any situation. The vahana, resting at Ganesha's feet, signifies that the Lord takes control of a devotee who surrenders to His will. He keeps the devotee's mind in his control, preventing it from playing havoc with the seeker, calming and soothing him down, allowing him to focus his full attention on the Lord.

Interestingly, Ganesha had also been portrayed with the lion in his incarnation as Vakratunda, with a peacock as Vikata and Shesha and with a divine serpent in his avatar as Vighnaraja. According to the Ganesha Purana, Mohotkata has a lion, Mayūreśvara has a peacock, Dhurmaketu has a horse, and Gajanana has a rat. Even Jain images of Ganesha show his vahana

variously as a mouse, elephant, tortoise, ram and peacock.

## Reason for Ganesha's being Elephant-headed

There are many stories as to how Ganesha became the elephant-headed Lord. Some texts claim that Ganesha was born with it, but most others relate that he acquires this head later.

The most popular story narrates how Ganesha was born with a human head and body and that Shiva beheaded him when Ganesha came between Shiva and Parvati. Shiva then replaced Ganesha's original head with that of an elephant. Parvati once collected all the sandalwood paste on her body and made a figure of a little boy out of it. She then gave it life and asked this son of hers to guard the gate when she went to bathe. When Shiva tried to enter the premises, the boy denied him entry, which made the former furious enough to behead him. When Parvati came out and saw what happened, she was absolutely devastated and asked Shiva to replace his head immediately. Shiva, not finding another human head at the time, fixed an elephant's head on the boy's shoulders.

In another story, the Shani Devata (Saturn), who is known to have an evil eye, looked at Ganesha, turning the baby's head to ashes. Vishnu then jumped to the rescue and replaced the infant's head with that of an elephant.

## Ganesha - the Omkaraswarupa

Lord Ganesha is also likened to the holy mantra of Aum, the Primordial Sound that created the whole Universe. The Ganapati Atharvashirsa, as translated by Swami Chinmayananda, says the following:

*(O Lord Ganapati!) You are the Divine Trinity - Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahesha. You are Indra. You are Agni (Fire) and Vayu (Air). You are the Surya (Sun) and the Chandrama (Moon). You are the Brahman (the Supreme One). You are the three worlds, Bhuloka (earth), Antariksha-loka (space), and Swargaloka (heaven). You are all this - you are the Om.*

In fact, many depictions of Ganesha's body actually resemble the shape of the Aum as written in the Devanagari and Tamil scripts.



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**LORD GANESHA INTEGRATED WITH OM**

## Ganesha as the Mooladhara Moorthy

According to Kundalini Yoga, there are seven chakras or spiritual centers in the subtle body. Ganesha is said to reside in the very first chakra, the Mooladhara. The word, "Mooladhara" is a combination of "Moola" or "original/fundamental" and "Adhara" or "base/foundation". It is said that Ganesha stabilizes and supports all the other chakras in one's sukshma sharira.

## Ganesha - the Wise One



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**GANESHA WITH SHIVA AND PARVATI**

Ganesha has a brother named Kartikeya or Skanda. He is also hailed as Murugan and by other names as well. In North India, Skanda is said to be the older sibling, while in the South, Ganesha is considered to be the elder brother. There are many stories which talk of sibling rivalry between the brothers. One of the most common is the Jnana Pazham (Fruit of Wisdom) incident.

One day, the Rishi, Narada, presents a Jnana Pazham to Shiva and Parvati. The couple is in a fix, as they do not know which of their sons to give it to. Then Shiva announces a contest, saying that the first child who goes round the whole world and comes back first would be the one to get the fruit. Murugan feels thrilled at this prospect. He climbs onto his vahana, the peacock, and immediately leaves Kailas in order to go around the world. Ganesha realizes that it would be impossible for him to fulfil the task, seated on his own vahana, the mouse. He thinks for

a while and then comes up with a brilliant idea.

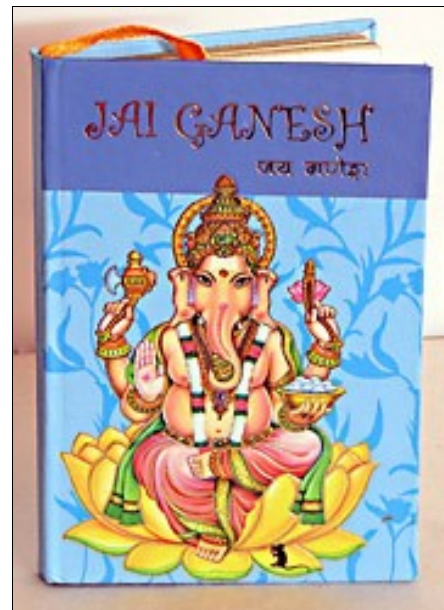
Ganesha humbly bows before his parents and after getting their blessings, circles them three times and then asks them for the fruit. Shiva and Parvati are surprised and enquire as to how this could happen. To this, he replies, "You are my world, so by circling you, I've circled the whole world". Shiva and Parvati are pleased with his wisdom and humility and at once hand over the fruit to Ganesha.

When Murugan gets back and sees what has happened, he is furious at being tricked and proceeds to Palani.

## Ganesha's worship - Ganesh Chaturthi

Ganesha, who is largely a universally loved God, is generally worshipped before the start of any occasion, function or even business venture. His most popular prayers are "Om Shri Ganeshaya Namah and Om Gam Ganapataye Namah. Devotees also offer Ganesha sweets like modaks and laddus. He is often shown carrying a bowl of sweets, called a modakapātra. He is also sometimes worshipped with red sandalwood paste (raktacandana) or red hibiscus flowers. Durva grass or Cynodon dactylon and other materials are also used in his worship.

Ganesh Chaturthi, which falls in the shuklapaksha (the fourth day of the waxing moon) in the month of Bhaadrapada (August/September) is the major festival associated with the Elephant-headed Lord. This festival ends on Ananta Chaturdashi day, when Ganesh murtis or idols are immersed in a body of water. Lokmanya Tilak transformed this annual Ganesha festival from private family celebrations into a grand public event in the year 1893. This was done mainly to bridge the gap between the various Hindu sects in existence at the time. Today, this has become a global event, with people from all religions and communities coming together to pray to their favourite God.



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**GANESHA CHALISA - BOOK OF PRAYERS**

## Main temples of Ganesha

Being the God of Transitions, Ganesha is placed at the doorway of most Hindu temples. But in addition to all these, he also has several temples dedicated just to his worship. The Ashtavinayak temples in Maharashtra are among the most famous. Each of these eight shrines is located within about a 100 kilometer distance from Pune and is dedicated to each of the eight forms of Ganpati. Each of these temples has a legend of its own. Together, they form the "mandala", forming the sacred cosmos of Ganesha.

The Siddhi Vinayak temple in Mumbai, India, is also one of the most famous Ganesha temple in the city, and is said to be extremely powerful as well. There are also other temples in Wai, Ujjain, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Varanasi, Gujarat, Tiruchirapalli, Rameshwaram, Suchindram, Chennai, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

There are many Ganesha temples in many foreign countries too, including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Europe and America.



## Lord Murugan



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**MURUGAN**

Kartikeya or Murugan, also called Subramanian, is another son of Shiva and an equally popular Hindu deity, especially among Tamil Hindus. Muruga or Murugan is predominantly revered in regions which have a clear Tamil influence, such as South India, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and so on. Even Malaysian Tamils pray to Lord Murugan during the period of Thai Pusam.

Lord Murugan is far more popular in South India than any other region of India. He is commonly regarded as the God of War and the protector and patron deity of Tamil Nadu. He is known by many other names, including Saravana, Senthil, Arumugam or Shanmukha ('one with six faces'), Kumara ('child or son'), Guhan ('cave-dweller'), Skanda, Velan (the one with the spear) and Swaminatha.

## Murugan in Tamil Literature

The emergence of Murugan as a popular God in Tamil Nadu dates back as early as the 10th Century B.C. The Tolkappiyam, which is supposedly the most ancient of the extant Sangam works, glorified Murugan thus: "the red god seated on the blue peacock, who is ever young and resplendent," as "the favoured god of the Tamils." In fact, the ancient Sangam Literature talks about Murugu as a certain nature spirit, which had been worshipped with animal sacrifices and was also associated with a non-Brahmin priest known as a Velan. This name later came to be used for the deity himself.

At the time, Murugu had often been worshipped in the woods and other open places. The rituals practiced included the Veriyaattu, a form of ritual-trance-dancing, which is, interestingly, still a common part of Murugan worship in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and even parts of Malaysia. Murugu was believed to wield power over the chaotic and could be appeased by sacrifices and Veriyaattu to bring order and prosperity.

## In Sanskrit Literature

Murugan emerges in Sanskrit literature too, as early as the first millennium BCE. Here, there are references to Subrahmanya in Kautilya's Arthashastra; in the treatises of Patanjali, in Kalidasa's epic poem the Kumarasambhavam as also in the famous Sanskrit drama, Mricchakatika. Ancient communities of people such as the Kushanas, Yaudheyas, Ikshvakus and Guptas worshipped an image very closely related to that of Skanda. During the time of Adi Sankara, followers of Kumara formed one of the six principal religious Hindu sects. Even today, many Saivait temples have an idol of Subramanya installed at the left side of the main deity.

## Murugan slays Surapadma

Sati, the daughter of Daksha, self-immolates at her father's Yagna (sacred fire ritual). When Shiva, her consort, comes to know of this, he is furious and rushes to the site of the Yagna. After having destroyed the Yagna, he picks up Sati's body and walks away into the forest. Shiva is extremely sad and lonely and completely withdraws from the material world and immerses himself in meditation in the Himalayas. Sati is then reborn as Parvati, the daughter of the Mountain King, Himavan.



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**SHIVA LIFTS SATI'S CORPSE**



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**PARVATI PINES AND PRAYS FOR LORD SHIVA**

Parvati is deeply in love with Shiva and visits his cave every single day. She cleans up the place, places flowers at his feet and implores him to look at her. So intense is her desire to appease Shiva that she refuses to eat even a morsel of food or drink a sip of water. She sheds all her clothes and royal finery and meditates, completely immune to the harsh weather conditions in the Himalaya. This is how Parvati gets her name as Uma and Aparna.

At around this time, the cruel demon Surapadman wreaked havoc on the earth. The gods realized that only Shiva's offspring would have the courage and valour to lead the gods to victory over Tarakasuran, Surapadman and their entire asura clan. They hatch a plan along with Kamadeva (the God of Love), to shoot flower arrows at Shiva, so as to make him fall in love with Parvati. Kamadeva aims his arrow and lets it go to Shiva, who is tremendously incensed at being disturbed during penance. He opens his third eye and instantly burns down Kamadeva to ashes. Shiva lays his eyes on Parvati and is immediately attracted towards her. Together, they leave for Kailas.

The sparks of this fire are so strong, that even Agni Deva (God of Fire) finds it impossible to tolerate it. The river Ganga transports the six sparks to a place located at the mouth of the Ganges, called Saravana Poigai. Here, the six sparks become six children and are raised by the six Kritika or Kartika, the stars making up the Pleiades. This is how Murugan gets his name, Kartikeya.

When Parvati sees the children, she is appalled, wondering how she would be able to raise six of them at the same time. The children immediately fuse into one child with six faces and twelve arms. Hence, his name also came to be Shanmukha or Aarumukha. His birth at the Saravana Poigai gave him the name Saravanabhava.

Murugan then went on to become the supreme general of all the demi-gods and also successfully led armies of Devas for their fights against asuras. This gave Kartikeya the name, Devasenapati. He traveled to six sites at while leading his armies against Surapadman. They are Tiruttanikai, Swamimalai, Tiruvavinankudi (Palani), Pazhamudirsolai, Tirupparamkunram and Tiruchendur. All these six sites have become six beautiful, ancient, temples and are collectively known as "Arupadai Veedu", meaning, the six battle camps of the Lord.

## **Legends related to Murugan**

There are various legends on Murugan, which are also recounted differently from treatise to treatise. One such legend shows Kartikeya helping out Shiva fight and defeat the newborn Ganesha.

The evil demon, Taraka, has a boon that only a son of Shiva would be able to slay him. This is soon after Sati's death, so Taraka takes it for granted that Shiva would not at all get remarried, and hence, would not have a son to call his own. It is believed that Murugan manifested for the sole purpose of killing Tarakasura.

After Murugan shifts to Palani following the Jnana Pazham incident, Shiva rushes to him in order to console him. Shiva says that he (Murugan) was himself the Fruit of Wisdom. Hence, the term 'Pazham Nee' (you are the fruit) came to be coined later as 'Palani'.

## **Physical attributes**

Lord Kartikeya is portrayed as a very beautiful deity, with six heads and twelve arms. This is also one reason why he is often termed as Azhagan (the handsome one). The six heads represent the six siddhis or spiritual powers. This also corresponds to his role as the bestower of the six siddhis. Murugan is often shown riding a peacock, holding his Vel or the Divine Spear or Lance, flanked by his two wives, Valli and Devayani. He is sometimes also depicted wielding other weapons like a sword, mace, discus, javelin and bow.

The spear, with which he is usually portrayed, symbolizes his being capable of purifying human ills and protecting his devotees from negative forces. Murugan's vahana, the peacock, stands for the destruction of ego and vanity that the peacock stands for.

It is said that Murugan split the asura Surapadman into two halves, one of which became his mount, the peacock and the other, the rooster flag, which he holds in his left hand.

## **Marrying Valli**

Murugan's marriage with Valli is actually a very interesting incident. The King Nambi Rajah of Chittoor was the king of the hunter tribe and had seven sons. He was desperate to have a beautiful daughter. In the meantime, the sage Sivamuni, who was in penance in the forest, happened to catch sight of a female deer and his mere sight resulted in the animal becoming pregnant. It so happened that the deer delivered a baby girl and abandoned her.

King Nambi, who had been on a hunting expedition in the forest, saw the lovely babe, brought her home and treated her as his own daughter. She was named Valli. She nurtured the thought of Murugan even from her tender age and was determined to have Him as her Husband and none else. When she came of marriageable age, Nambi Rajah,



sent her to 'tinaippunam' (field growing the tinai millet). She was asked to keep vigil sitting on a high rise rostrum, so as to protect the crop from birds and the like. At this time, Valli also received guru diksha from sage Narada who foretold that Murugan would end up marrying her. The sage also informed Murugan about how much in love Valli was with him.

Murugan decided he would not accede to marrying Valli all too easily. So he began to play a leela with her. He first came to her as a hunter but she did not respond to his overtures. He then turned into a giant venkai tree when Valli's father suddenly came to visit her. He then took the form of a very hungry old man and greedily ate up the millet flour and honey mixture offered by Valli. Then, much to the chagrin of Valli, he proposed marriage to her.

Valli became aggressive and proceeded to chide him for his misdemeanour. Finally, Murugan invoked the blessings of His elder brother Ganesha for success of His mission. Ganesha appeared at once, taking the form of a wild tusker and began to chase Valli. Terrified by the elephant, Valli ran for protection and came straight into the arms of Murugan.

## Valli and Devayani

Valli and Devayani, Murugan's consorts, were actually Sundaravalli and Amudavalli. It is said that they were born out of the tears of joy of Narayana when He incarnated as Trivikrama. Both these beautiful damsels did intense penance for attaining status as Murugan's consorts. Pleased with their prayers, Murugan appeared before them and ordained that Amudavalli would be born in Devaloka as Indra's daughter, while Sundaravalli would take birth on the earth in a hunter tribe.

Murugan also promised to marry both Valli and Devayani. The marriage of Murugan and Devayani took place with great pomp and with full Vedic rights at Tirupparankundram. Devayani was gifted to Murugan by Lord Indra as a symbol of his gratitude for the heroism and valour displayed by Murugan as the Devasenapati and His ultimate triumph over the asuras.



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**MURUGAN WITH VALLI AND DEVYANI**

## The Kavadi Attam

The Kavadi Attam is a dance performed at the time of the ceremonial worship of Murugan, during Thai Pusam, revering him as the God of War. This is symbolic of the devotees carrying a physical burden, imploring the Lord to release them from material bondage.

There is a story behind this Kavadi. Lord Shiva once entrusted the dwarf saint sage Agastya to carry two hillocks and install them in South India. But the sage asked his disciple, Idumban to get them instead. Idumban could not initially lift the hillocks, until he obtained divine help. Idumban put the hillocks down to rest awhile, near Palani. When he attempted to continue with his journey, he found that the hillocks were immovable.

Idumban then sought the help of a scantily dressed youth, who said that the hillocks belonged to him. In the ensuing scuffle, Idumban was defeated. Idumban realized then that the youth was none other than Lord Murugan. Idumban pleaded to be pardoned and asked that anyone who comes to the hills to worship Murugan with an object similar to the two hillocks suspended by a rod, may be granted his heart's desire. Idumban's wish was granted. That is how the kavadi came to play its role in Hindu festivals.

## Lifting the Kavadi

The Kavadi is made up of twin semicircular pieces of wood or steel, bent over and attached to a cross structure that can be balanced on the shoulders of the devotee. It is usually decorated with flowers and peacock feathers. Some of the Kavadis can weigh up to 30 kilograms!

## The Vel Kavadi

The Vel Kavadi is the most spectacular object of worship. A sort of altar up to two meters tall, it is decorated with peacock feathers and attached to the devotee through 108 vels or spears, pierced into the skin on the chest and back. Fire walking may also be practiced. It is claimed that devotees, at this time, are able to enter a trance, feel no pain, do not bleed from their wounds and have no scars left behind.

But not all Kavadi types involve extreme physical endurance. Some devotees merely carry a brass jug of milk on their heads while others carry small pots with offerings for their Lord.

## Worship of Murugan in India



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**MURUGAN WITH HIS PLACES OF  
WORSHIP**

Murugan is particularly worshipped for a six day period of fast and prayer in the Tamil month of Aippasi known as the Skanda Shasti. He is also venerated during Thai Pusam, celebrated by Tamil communities worldwide, near the full moon of the Tamil month Thai. This is symbolic of the day when Murugan was given a Vel by his mother, Parvati, in order to vanquish the asuras. Thirukarthigai or the full moon of the Tamil month of Karthigai signifies his birth. Each Tuesday of the Tamil month of Adi is also dedicated to the worship of Murugan.

Kartikeya's popularity in North India receded from the Middle Ages onwards, and except in some regions of Haryana, his name was almost totally unknown. There is a very famous Murugan temple in Pehowa town in Haryana. Women stay away from this temple, as it celebrates the Brahmachari form of Kartikeya. Other temples include those at Achaleshwar, near Batala in Punjab; one on top of a hill in Pune, Maharashtra and in Bengal, where he is worshipped during the Durga Puja festivities alongside Durga.

In Kerala, the Subramanya temple in Haripad and the Udayanapuram Subrahmanya Swamy temple in Kottayam are two of the several temples dedicated to the worship of Murugan. In Tulu Nadu, there is the famed temple called Kukke Subramanya Temple, where Murugan is worshipped as the Lord of the serpents.

## Murugan's worship abroad

In Sri Lanka, Murugan is venerated by both Tamil Hindus and Sinhalese Buddhists. Several temples exist throughout the island. He is a favorite deity in this part of the world and it is believed he never hesitates to come to the aid of a devotee when called upon.

In the south of Sri Lanka, Kartikeya is worshipped at the temple in Kataragama (Kathirkamam), where he is hailed as Katragama Deviyo (Lord of Katragama) or Kathiravel. This temple is next to an old Buddhist place of worship. Local legend holds that Lord Murugan alighted in Kataragama and was smitten by Valli, one of the local aboriginal lasses. After a long courtship, they got married.

The Nallur Kandaswamy temple, the Maviddapuram temple and the Sella Channithy temple near Valvettiturai are important Murugan temples in Jaffna. The Chitravelautha temple in Verukal on the Trincomalee border and the Mandur Kandaswamy temple in Batticaloa are equally famous. The late medieval-era temple of the tooth in Kandy, dedicated to the tooth relic of the Buddha, has a Kataragama deiyo shrine adjacent to it dedicated to the veneration of Skanda in the Sinhalese tradition.

The most famous Murugan temple in Malaysia is located at the Batu Caves, very close to Kuala Lumpur. There is a 42.7m high statue of Lord Murugan at the entrance to the Batu Caves, which is the largest Lord Murugan statue in the world. Sri Thendayuthapani Temple in Tank Road, Singapore, is yet another major Hindu temple where each year the Thai Pusam festival takes place with devotees of Lord Murugan carrying Kavadis seeking penance and blessings of the Lord.

The Highgate Hill Murugan temple in the UK is one of the oldest and most famous. In London, Sri Murugan temple in Manor park is a well known temple.

In Sydney, the Murugan temple in Parramatta (Mays Hill) is a major Hindu temple for all Australian Hindus, whereas, in the USA, the Shiva Murugan Temple in Concord, Northern California and The Murugan Temple of North America in Maryland, Washington DC region are extremely popular. In Toronto, Canada, Canada Kanthasamy Temple is known amongst many Hindus in Canada.

The Sri Sivasubramaniam Temple, located in the Sihl Valley in Adliswil, is the most famous and largest Hindu temple in Switzerland.

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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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