

Stories from the Puranas Retold

Nalini Sahay

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Stories about Shiva



Introduction

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There is also the matter of images. In a way the images of India - the great idols in worship, the wayside shrines, the calendar art images, the great and the small sculpture - are abstraction of the stories and the personal message of the stories.

In this book, written entirely for the web, the stories have been cast in a simplified mould. The intent is to familiarize the new visitor and to aid recall for the old friend.

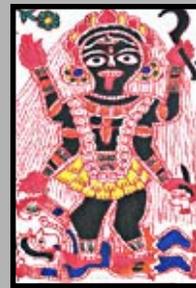
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We hope the reader enjoys this presentation of ancient text and is encouraged to delve deeper into our well of faith.



Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



Shiva the strong, silent one.



Brahma's sons were having a boasting match. Agni, Vayu and Indra each made extravagant statements about their promises. Suddenly there appeared a little goblin (Yaksha) who showed them a blade of grass. He asked the three of them to destroy it. Agni's flames could not consume it, Vayu's breath could not dislodge it. Indra's thunderbolt could not shake it. In unison the trio wondered how they could not burn it, blow it or splice it. The little goblin scornfully said that it was beyond their powers. In one voice they asked who? He replied that it was Shiva with a chortle and he disappeared. Agni and Vayu were downcast but Indra gripped his thunderbolt and scowled. He decided that he would teach this Shiva a lesson. So he set off for Kailash.



...Shiva the strong, silent one.



On arriving at Kailash he saw this naked ascetic. In a loud voice, he asked him who he was. He answered that he was Shiva. Indra by now was so full of his pomposity, that he said how could a naked ascetic covered in ash teach him, the great Indra and his brothers a lesson. Shiva was silent. Indra got so carried away with his imagined superiority that he raised his little thunderbolt to strike Shiva. Shiva just opened his third eye slightly. Brahma who had been silent all along was distraught at Indra's insulting behavior. He begged Shiva not to destroy him. His reasoning was that if Indra the leader of the gods was destroyed there would be mayhem.

The universe would be over run with demons. Shiva hurled his fire into the ocean. From the boiling water arose the demon Jalandhara. Jalandhara became the master mind of the demon clan.

Shiva



...Shiva the strong, silent one.

The gods were downtrodden and Indra was driven out of Indralok. He was a broken god and he went to Brahma for help. Brahma counselled him to go and seek Shiva's help. But Indra was nervous as he remembered that Shiva had said to him, that he would be humiliated by him.

Brahma urged him to go as he said that Shiva was not a grudge bearer. Jalandhara imagined that he was the strongest and when Indra told him about Shiva, he asked who he was. Indra told him that he was an ascetic who lived on mount Kailash. Cocky Jalandhara went off to Kailash to fight Shiva. Shiva smiled at the demon and drew a circle round his toe. Then he told him that he would fight him if he carried this bit of land on his head. Jalandhara readily agreed and placed the piece of earth on his head. It became bigger and bigger and heavier and heavier.. Jalandhara's neck snapped and skull cracked. The last thoughts he had were that Shiva carried the crescent moon on his head whereas he could not even hold a tiny piece of earth, if Shiva did not will it.



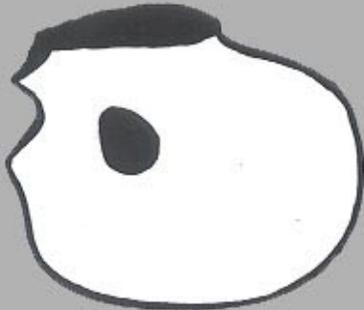
Why Shiva dressed as a Sadhu/Priest?



There was a time when there was nothing left in the universe. It had all been destroyed. There remained only the air and a flat expanse of water. Brahma slept for thousands of aeons. Day broke when Brahma awakened. He assumed five heads and set about to create the universe. Simultaneously another body was created and this form had three eyes. From his breath Brahma created consciousness with which he imbued both himself and Rudra, the god with the third eye..



...Why Shiva dressed as a Sadhu/Priest?



Rudra, whose consciousness directed him towards questioning, asked Brahma where he came from and who created him? Brahma, whose assumptions were more certain, took umbrage and stated that he, Brahma created everything. A terrible quarrel resulted. Finally, Rudra cut off Brahma's fifth head and thereafter has been called Shiva. The head remained struck to Shiva's hand and it would not fall to the ground. Shiva fled to Varanasi and undertook great penance by the banks of the river. Shiva was absolved from his sin with the understanding that both he and Brahma would coexist. But as a part of his penance, he was to carry Brahma's skull with him wherever he went. So Shiva has always remained a searching ascetic.



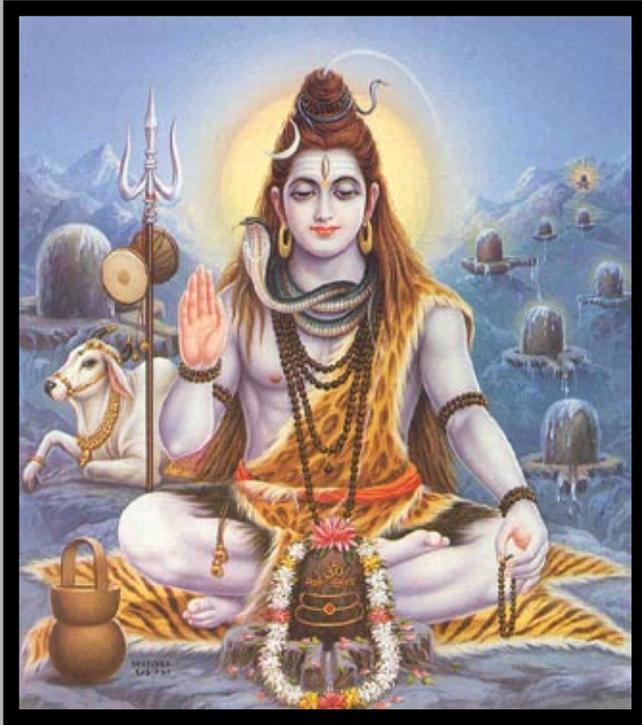
How Shiva came to be worshipped as a Linga?



There are several stories about how Shiva came to be represented as a Linga for worship. According to the Padmapurana, Bhrigu, the great ascetic came to visit Shiva at his abode. He was not allowed to enter immediately as Shiva was with Parvati. Bhrigu being hot tempered and impetuous cursed that whenever men contemplate on Shiva, the abiding representative image would be that of a linga and a yoni.



...How Shiva came to be worshipped as a Linga?



According to the Vamana Purana, Shiva was mad with grief when Sati died. He wandered from hermitage to hermitage, blind with sorrow, unseeing and restless. The hermit's wives fell in love with him and they followed him. This enraged the hermits and they cursed him, saying that he would lose his man-hood. Vishnu and Brahma were horrified and they interceded on Shiva's behalf, who remained unaware of all this commotion. The hermits agreed to take back their curse on the condition that Shiva be only represented by the Linga which then became an image of worship.



...How Shiva came to be worshipped as a Linga?



Another story from Shiva Purana describes how the King of Kamarupa triumphed over a monster by praying to the Linga. Bhima the monster became invincible after being granted a boon by Rama. He attacked the king of Kamarupa and grabbed his wealth and kingdom. The king was kept in solitary confinement in a dungeon. The king was a Shiva devotee and he kept making clay figures of the Linga and worshipped them daily. In the meanwhile the monster Bhima was becoming more powerful and evil. He conquered more kingdoms and banned all prayers and rituals. The gods were severely affected.



...How Shiva came to be worshipped as a Linga?



They begged Shiva to help them. Shiva promised that he would destroy Bhima through the prayers of the king of Kamarupa. One day, when the king was in meditation before the Linga, the guard entered his cell. In astonishment he ran to tell his master Bhima what was happening. Bhima pulled out his sword and roared at Kamarupa, who continued his meditation undeterred. Bhima shouted and shouted but the king would not respond. In fury, Bhima determined to strike off the king's head but he was afraid to touch a man in prayer. So he slashed at the clay Linga. Instantly, he realized his folly, for the Linga was indeed Shiva, and nothing could destroy him. Bhima and his army became worshippers of the Shiva Linga and caused great temples to be built for Shiva.



Shiva the Yogi



While Shiva was doing penance in Varanasi, many thoughts came to him. He was angry with himself for cutting off Brahma's head. He was sorrowful about his anger. There had to be way where by one could be detached and in control of one's mind. Then the revelation came to him. There had to be a balance between the mind and the body. There must be a union of the mental, physical and emotional processes.



...Shiva the Yogi



This was Yoga. Shiva started teaching, even as he himself learnt and experimented. He charged no fee and he told his students that they were reborn again and again because of their actions. His lessons were attended by sages, ascetics, goblins, monsters and gods. All these people felt the pressure of life, of want, of desire. After explaining the philosophy of Yoga, Shiva showed them how to go about it. He talked about becoming aware of one's actions and practicing discipline.



...Shiva the Yogi



He then demonstrated 840,000 poses (asanas) which were derived from birds, beasts and trees. These asana's affected the well being of the body and they energized the practitioners. He then taught pranayama (balance of life force) through breathing practices. He asked them to internalize their thoughts and feelings through pranayama. The final stage was through meditation which led to samadhi. His students listened open mouthed. They followed his instructions and they were ecstatic. They now knew the secret of life. They were at peace with themselves. Patanjali compiled these teachings in the Yoga Sutra.



How Shiva rewarded his devotee - Ravana?



Ravana, the famous demon of the illustrious epic Ramayana was an ardent devotee of lord Shiva. In the course of time Ravana practised severe austerities to please Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva. He acquired several boons which in turn enabled him to conquer the three worlds, the earth, heaven and the underworld. Once when Ravana was meditating Shiva was romancing with Parvati. Shiva happened to say some thing to Parvati which made her angry and walk away from him



...How Shiva rewarded his devotee - Ravana?



Ravana resented the fact that Shiva was ignoring his prayers and ablutions. In a fit of rage, he took the whole of Mt.Kailash in his hands and started tilting it violently. The all-seeing Shiva immediately understood the cause of disturbance.



...How Shiva rewarded his devotee - Ravana?



Frightened, Parvati immediately went back to Shiva and embraced him, forgetting her quarrels. Shiva was immensely pleased with his devotee's adventure. Immediately Shiva appeared before Ravana and gifted him his famous sword Chandrahasa.





Stories about the divine couple

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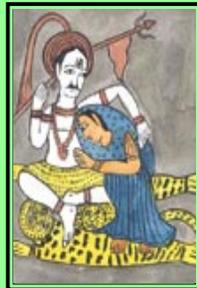
An Equal Marriage

Ardhanarnari - Complete Wo/Man



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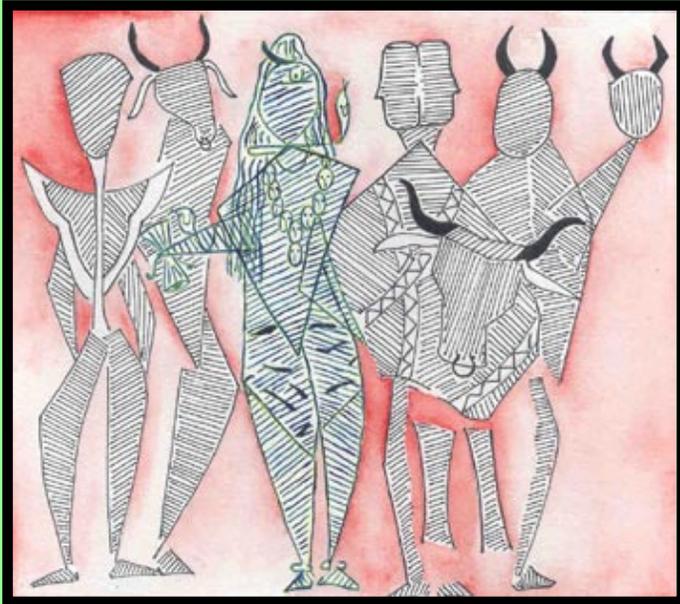


Madhya Pradesh
tribal art

Stories about the divine couple



Marriage to Sati



Shiva led the life of an ascetic, abandoning worldly life and choosing mountains and cremation grounds as his home. He kept the company of his ganas(followers), notorious for their unruly behaviour, with no sense of social obligations.



...Marriage to Sati



His disregard for rituals obligatory for both Gods and humans and his absolute indifference to social life alarmed the gods, especially Brahma. Brahma and Vishnu agreed that only a woman could divert Shiva from his ways. So, they asked the Mother Goddess to take birth as the daughter of Daksha, the son of Brahma, and who was the master of all sacrifices and ceremonies.



...Marriage to Sati



The Goddess was named Sati. From the very beginning she knew that her destiny was to marry Shiva, although her father did not entirely approve of Shiva's non-conformist ways and his blatant disregard for ritual. He had very little say in the matter however, as his daughter was bent on marrying Shiva. Daksha reluctantly agreed to the marriage, and the wedding was consecrated in the presence of all the gods.



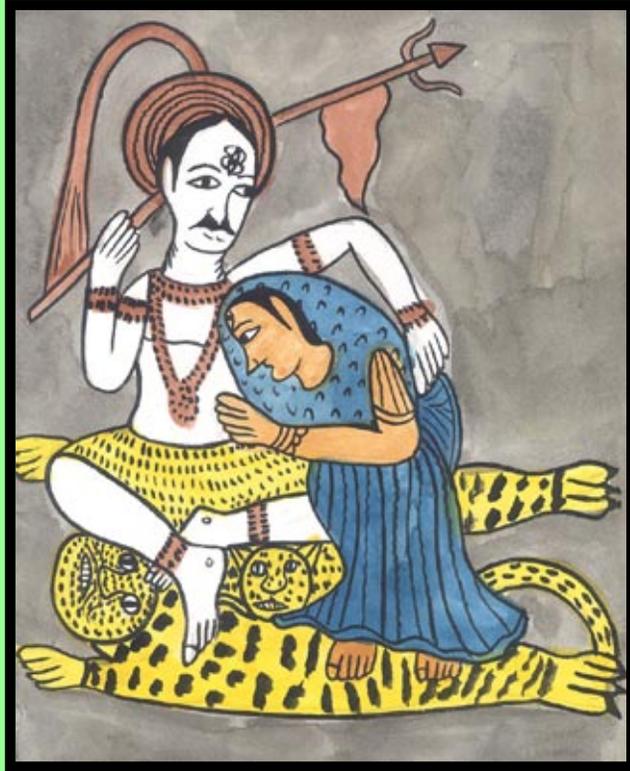
...Marriage to Sati



At Shiva's abode Kailash, Sati saw the Moon and his consorts passing by. They told her they were going to participate in Daksha's sacrifice (Yagya).



...Marriage to Sati



Sati went to Shiva and told him about it and suggested that they should go for her father's yagya. Shiva told her that since he was not invited he would not go. But Sati insisted that she wanted to go and if Shiva would not she would go alone.



...Marriage to Sati

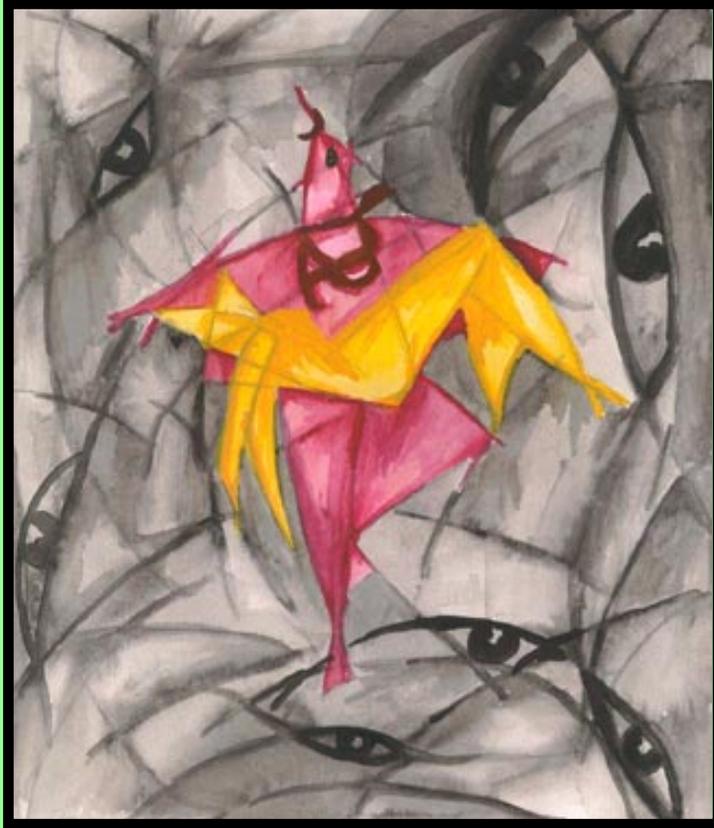


When Sati arrived at her father's palace she saw the grand preparations for the yagya. All the other gods except Shiva were invited and present. When Daksha saw Sati, instead of welcoming her, he insulted her in front of the gods. He told her that neither Shiva nor anyone who worshipped him was welcome to his yagya. All the gods and sages kept a studied silence. Furious at this insult, Sati immolated herself in her own inner fire.

Upon hearing of Sati's tragedy Shiva was overcome with grief and anger. In rage he plucked out a tuft of his hair. Two fierce deities came into being. They were Bhadrakali and Veerabhadra. They entered Daksha's sacrificial area with an army of rabid dogs, ghosts, ghouls, demons, fiends and spirits. They wrecked the hall, kicking sacred vessels, burning the pavilions, tearing tapestries and beheading the gods.



...Marriage to Sati



They dragged Daksha to the sacrificial fire, cut off his head and threw it into the flames. Shiva himself came and picked up the charred body of Sati and wandered through the universe. His grief threatened the very existence of the Cosmic Order. To distract Shiva Vishnu used his chakra to cut Sati's body into 51 parts. Shiva then regained his calm, restoring life to Daksha and the dead gods.



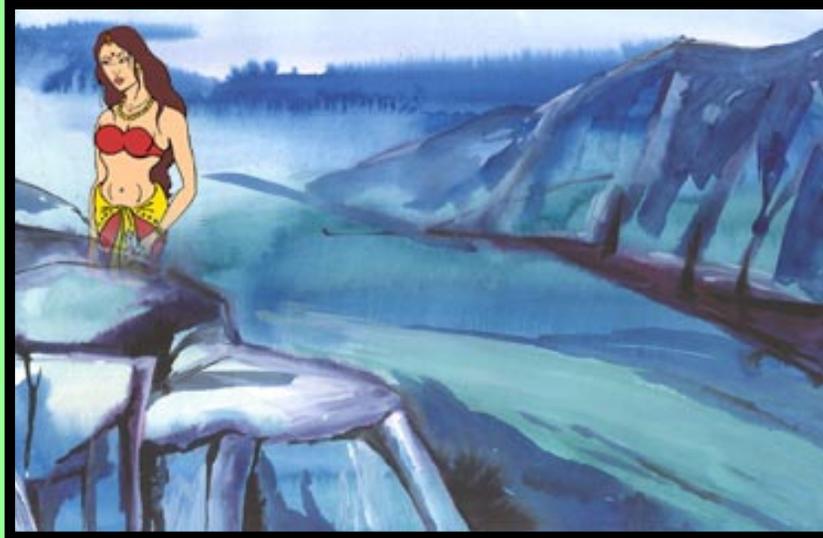
Marriage To Parvati



After the death of his first wife Sati, Shiva immersed himself in his own world of yogic practices and solitary meditation. The gods needed Shiva and wanted his presence. To bring him back into the world, Sati was reborn as Parvati the daughter of Himavat, the King of the Himalayas.



...Marriage To Parvati



The goddess Parvati, came into being with the sole intention of uniting with Shiva. For years and years she performed extreme austerities and prayers to impress Shiva. She had help from Gods as well - by Brahma's orders Kamadeva, the God of Love, tried to shoot his arrows of desire at Shiva to make him fall in love with Parvati.



...Marriage To Parvati

An irate Shiva, however, turned his third eye at Kamadev and reduced him to a pile of ashes. Parvati's prayers and meditations were so sincere, however, that Shiva soon found it difficult to ignore her. Finally when Parvati's prayers exceeded all limits, Shiva disguised himself as an old saint and visited her. After praising her beauty, he questioned her single-minded devotion. He asked her if Shiva was worth the effort.



...Marriage To Parvati



He even described his impossible habits: drunken revelry, intoxication, his ascetic excesses, his fascination for cremation grounds and so forth. He tried to persuade her not to be stubborn and to seek someone young and handsome instead. The indignant Parvati defended all her lover's eccentricities. Convinced by her devotion and faith in him, Shiva revealed his true form and agreed to marry her.



...Marriage To Parvati



Parvati insisted on a big wedding, and persuaded Shiva to take the form of a handsome young man and meet her father to ask for her hand in marriage. Impressed by him, Himavat accepted Shiva's proposal.

But on the day of the wedding, Shiva went to Himavat's palace in his normal form. He was dressed in tiger skin, covered with ashes, garlanded with snakes, and seated on his bull, Nandi. He was also accompanied by his notorious ganas.



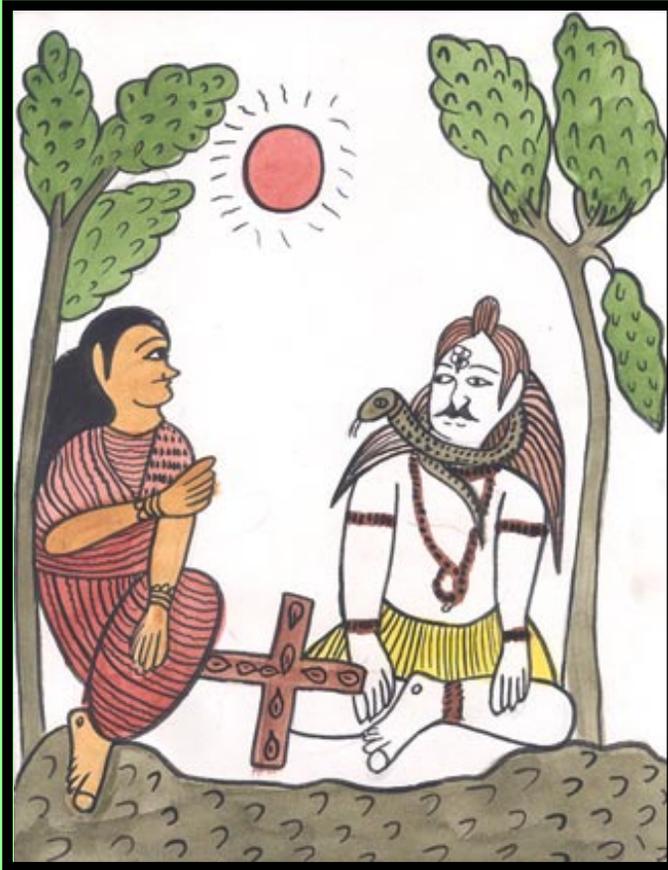
...Marriage To Parvati



Disgusted with his appearance, Parvati's mother promptly refused to let her daughter marry Shiva, the leader of this band of hooligans. Once again Shiva had to change his form into a handsome god, and the wedding was consecrated in the presence of all the gods.



Game of Dice



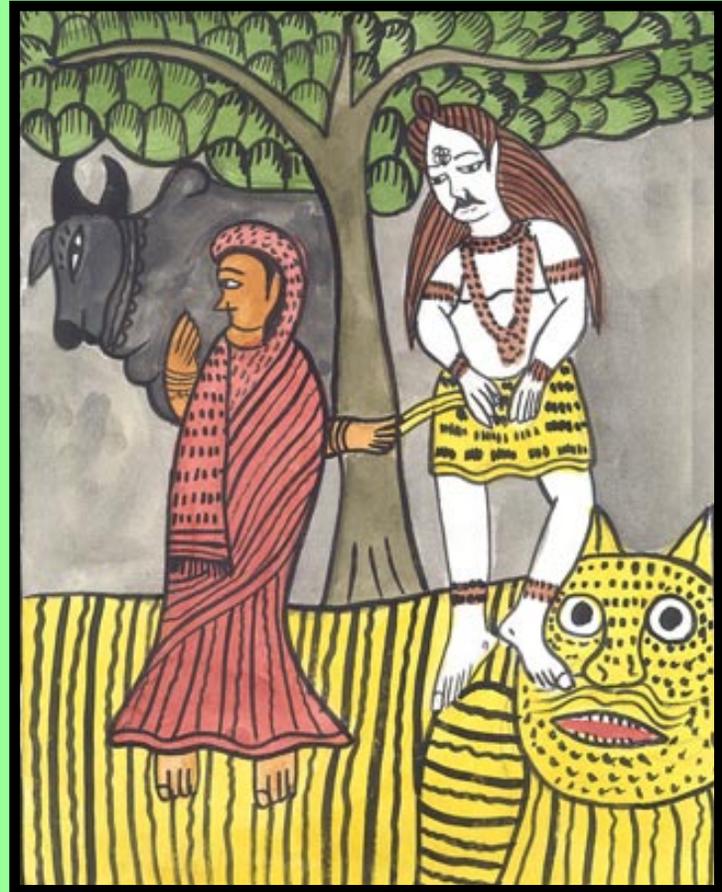
Once upon a time, Shiva and Parvati were playing dice on Mount Kailash. In a playful mood, Shiva wagered his trident, and Parvati her jewels. Shiva lost the game, his trident, and continued to lose all his possessions, down to his loincloth. Ashamed, Shiva left Kailash to go to the deodar forest, where he met Vishnu, who offered to help him. He told Shiva to play another game, and this time he guaranteed that Shiva would win.



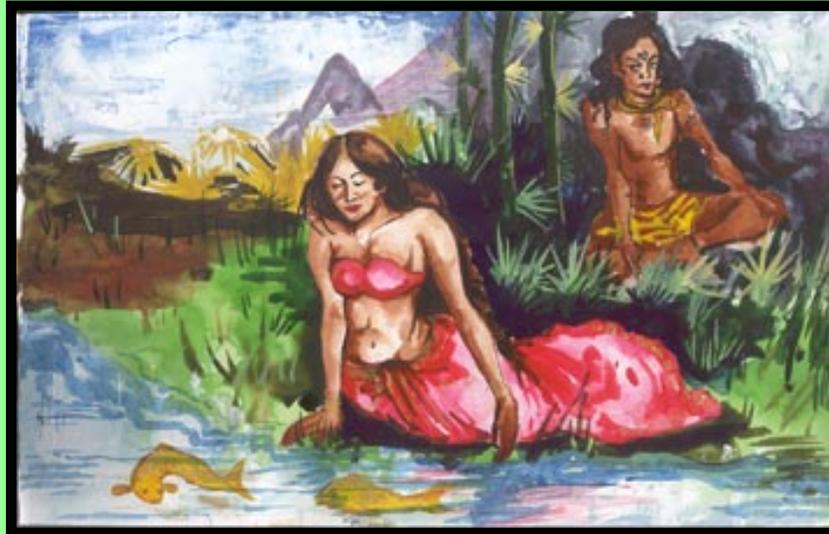
...Game of Dice

Another game ensued, and sure enough, Shiva did win. A suspicious Parvati called him a cheat. Shiva offended, demanded an apology. Before the argument could degenerate into a serious fight, Vishnu intervened to pacify them both. He explained to Parvati that the dice moved as he desired, and not as she moved it. Therefore, Shiva did not actually win and nor did she actually lose. The entire game was merely an illusion.

They were both pacified by Vishnu's words, and realised that life itself is a game of dice, moved by forces beyond control. They said, "Let the gods bless all those who play dice on this day and realise this cosmic truth." This was the day of the festival of lights, or Diwali



How Shiva could not live without Parvati?



Shiva and Parvati would sit atop Mount Kailash and discuss the wonders of the universe. One day, Parvati was distracted, and was staring into the lake Mansarovar, watching the fishes swim. Angered by her lack of attention, Shiva said that if she was so interested in fish, she should become a fisherwoman.



...How Shiva could not live without Parvati?



Thus she took birth as the daughter of a fisherman. In the course of time, she made her father proud by her strength and beauty. She did all the work that was asked of her, cleaning the fish that were caught, steering her father's boat, and mending his nets. Her father had no worries apart from finding a good husband for her.



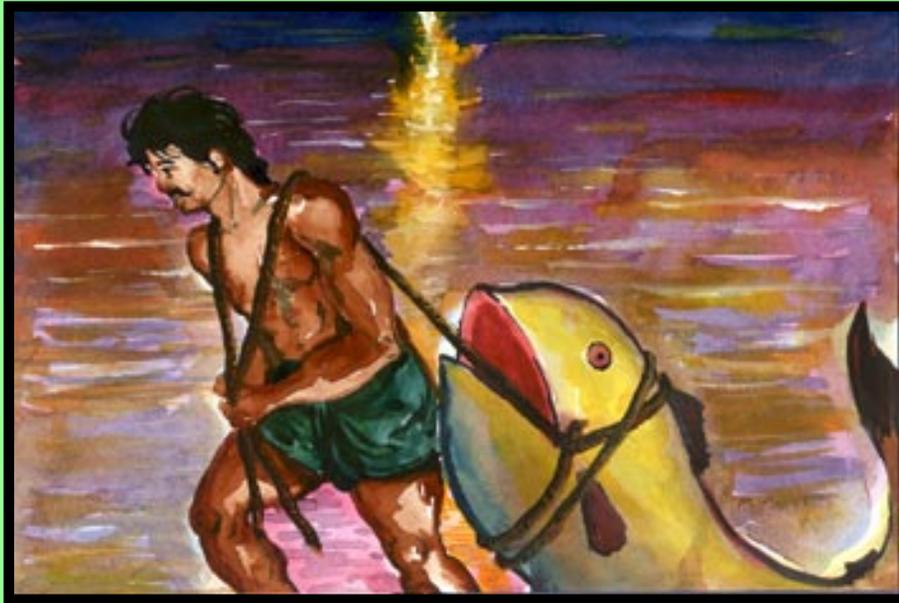
...How Shiva could not live without Parvati?



In the meantime, Shiva was regretting the way he had treated Parvati. He used to watch her from Kailash, and yearned for her day and night. His faithful gana, Manibhadra, saw his master pining for Parvati, and decided to do something about it. He became a huge shark, and began to attack the fishermen near Parvati's village.



...How Shiva could not live without Parvati?



Soon, most fishermen were too afraid to venture into the sea, and their source of livelihood was threatened. Parvati's father announced that whoever could capture the shark could marry his daughter. Shiva instantly transformed himself into a young fisherman and captured the shark. He thus brought Parvati back into his life..

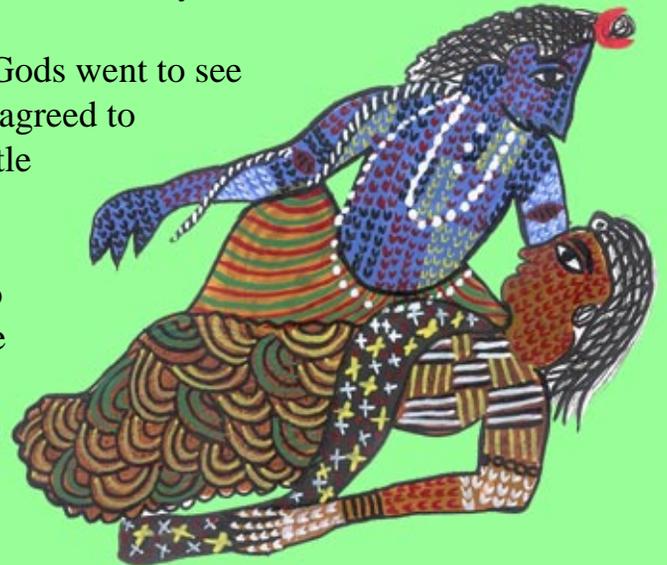


An Equal Marriage

Siva and Parvati had a relationship of equals and their marriage had its stormy days. Often they were at logger heads as both wanted to fulfill the prayers of their devotees and sometimes this created conflict. Parvati may want to curse someone who had asked for Siva's blessings, or vice versa!

Rama was unable to get the better of Ravana in the battle at Lanka because Ravana was a Siva Bhakt. This was distressing the Gods immensely. How could a demon king be supported by Siva?

The outcome was that Ram and the other Gods went to see Siva to ask him to cease helping Ravana. Siva agreed to accompany them on the seventh day of the battle and be a spectator to Ravana's destruction. When Parvati heard what Siva was going to do, she was scandalized. How could Siva go to watch the downfall of his devout devotee? One who had braved the foulest weather to pray to him, who had unquestioningly followed the Yoga of Siva?



...An Equal Marriage

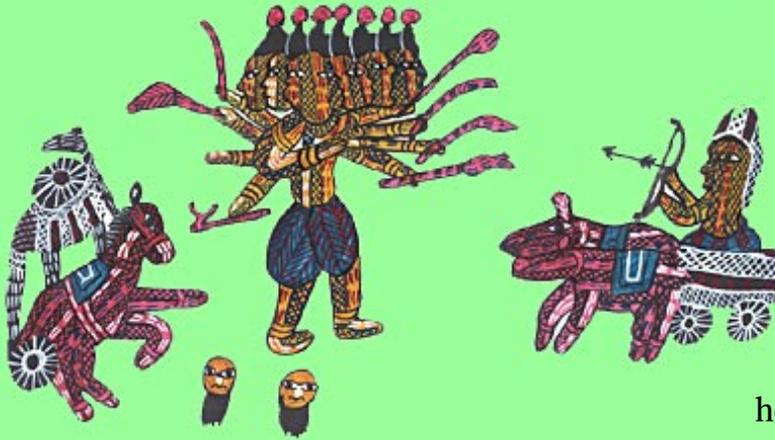


She questioned his reason and carried away, accused him of having a befuddled mind because of his hemp smoking habits, she blamed his choice of friends, she harangued him about the strange charnel houses and cemeteries that he visited. She went on about his attire, smeared with ash.

Siva was stung by her outburst. He retorted that she was mere woman and what did she know about life? She did not behave like a lady, always going out to battle for all sorts of people. Had'nt she drunk not only alcohol but the blood of her enemies? Who would like to hang out with her? Parvati eyes gleamed with rage at these insults. The gods were terrified of what would happen to them, caught between this cosmic muddle.



...An Equal Marriage



They entreated Rama to fall at Parvati's feet and ask for her help, or Ravana would destroy them all. Rama the gentle one did just that. In a trice Parvati understood Ravana's arrogance and falsehood. She agreed to

help Rama. She told him to perform a sacrifice and invite Ravana. If Ravana did not attend, he would destroy himself as he had avoided a great ritual, if he joined the ritual as a priest he would give Rama a blessing and this blessing would be his retribution.

Ravana attended the yagya as the priest and blessed Ram saying that he would be successful in achieving his objective. Ram defeated Ravana and he was killed by an arrow.



Ardhanarnari - Complete Wo/Man



Since Shiva practiced a life of austerity, he took care of his family by begging for food. One day while he was under the influence of stimulants, he forgot to fetch food for Parvati, Ganesh and Kartikeya. They were all famished and there was no dinner. What was left from the day before had been polished off by Ganesha's Rat and Kartikeya's Peacock. Parvati could not bear to see her sons hungry, so she left for her father's home. Shiva sheepishly stepped out to ask for alms.

Stories about the divine couple

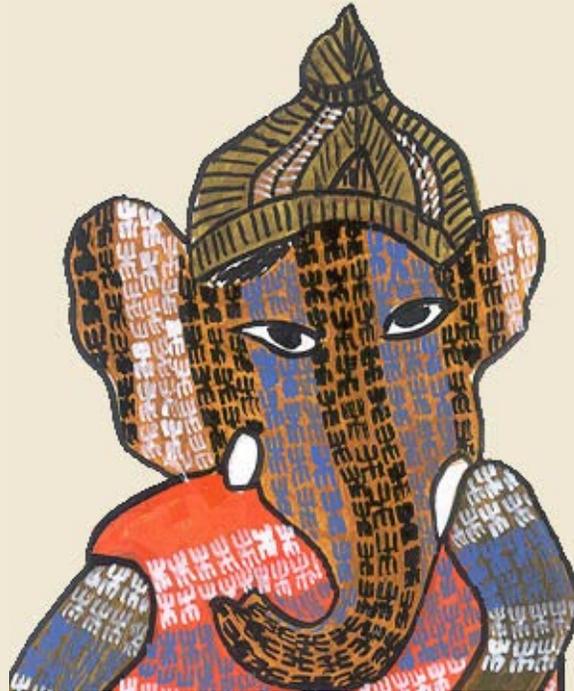


... Ardhanarnari - Complete Wo/Man



On her way Parvati met Narada Muni. He said that she should teach Shiva a lesson - as she was also Annapurna, the goddess of plenty, she should cast a spell so that none of the houses where Shiva went begging gave him food. Narada Muni then changed his stride and went to Shiva, who was now having a bad time. Narada Muni told him to go home. He saw Parvati in the form of Annapurna standing at the door and she fed him. He was so joyous at the event that he embraced her. So tightly that they became one body. Since then Shiva and Parvati are also known as Ardhanarnari - the other half is woman.





Stories about Ganesha

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The Creation of Ganesha

Parental Love

Ganesha loses a tusk.

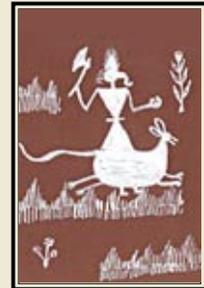
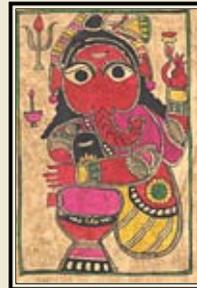
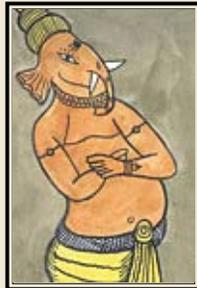
Ganesha the Writer

Ganesha and the Cat



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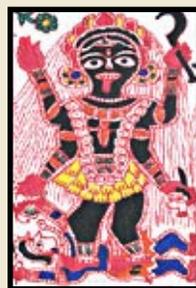
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Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style

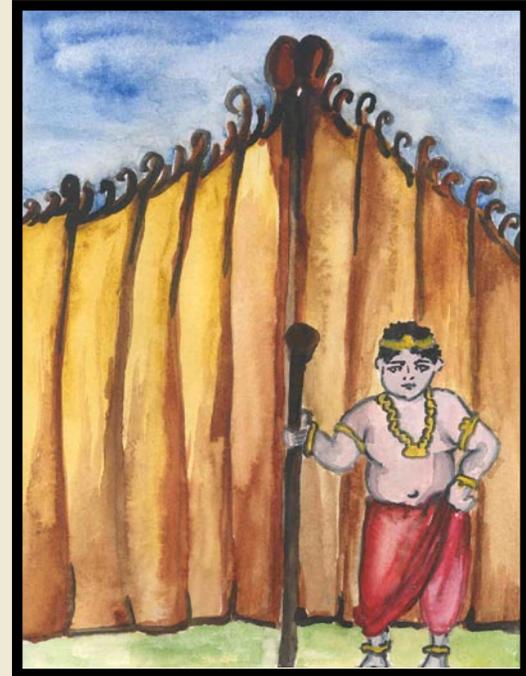


Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



The Creation of Ganesha

Parvati and Shiva spent a great deal of time together and Parvati was not pleased when Shiva's attention was diverted away from her. Shiva also would go away for days to meditate in solitude. Parvati started day dreaming about a baby whom she could cuddle and pamper. One day Shiva told her that he would be away from Kailash for a couple of days. She was upset at being left alone once again. From the fragrant unguents which were made from sandalwood, turmeric and rose petals that had been on her body she created a beautiful golden boy.



...The Creation of Ganesha

He jumped up and called her mother. She looked at him with pride. Shiva was away longer than expected. Parvati never let her son Ganesha out of sight, even when she went for her bath she asked him to stand outside. Shiva arrived worried, sweaty and anxious to see his wife but he was barred from entering by this handsome boy. He asked Shiva who he was as his mother was performing her daily ritual of dressing before praying. Shiva looked at him and said that it was none of his business and beheaded him.



...The Creation of Ganesha

Parvati emerged from her room and was furious at what Shiva had done. Shiva who loved Parvati more than anyone else in the world, promised that he would replace Ganesha's head. The first creature he saw was an elephant and he fitted the elephant head to the boy's body.



...The Creation of Ganesha

Thereafter he accepted Ganesha as his son and ordered that the name of Ganesha would be invoked before any prayer, ritual or ceremony. Even today we pray to Ganesha first for success in any endeavor.



Parental Love

Ganesha and Kartikeya were much loved by their parents. Parvati wanted a daughter-in-law but she could not decide which of her sons should get married first. Both wanted to be married. Shiva and Parvati thought and thought about it. How should they say who should be the first to get a bride? Shiva smoked his hemp pipe and Parvati patted her lion, tickled him under the chin. They came upon a brilliant idea. They would challenge both the boys to circle the world three times and whoever made it first would be wedded first. Kartikeya got on his mount, the peacock and flew away. He visited all the holy spots and offered prayers. Ganesha knew that because of his weight and his mount he would never be able to circle the world three times and Kartikeya would win. He sat with his head in his hands, brooding. Then it struck him that his parents were his universe.



...Parental Love

He saw a flash of peacock feathers and knew that his brother would soon descend to Kailash. He skipped round his parents three times and sat down cross legged.

Kartikeya jumped off his bird and breathlessly said that he had won. Ganesha said that he was wrong because he had won. Kartikeya, mopping the sweat off his brow, chided him that he had not even left Kailash. Ganesha answered that for him his parents were the very world and he had been around them three times. Shiva and Parvati chuckled and also



...Parental Love

felt proud of their sons. Parvati being a fair mother said that Kartikeya would henceforth be worshipped for his strength and Ganesha for his wisdom. Shiva declared that Ganesha would get married first. The consorts are Siddhi and Buddhi, two sisters who represent success and intelligence.

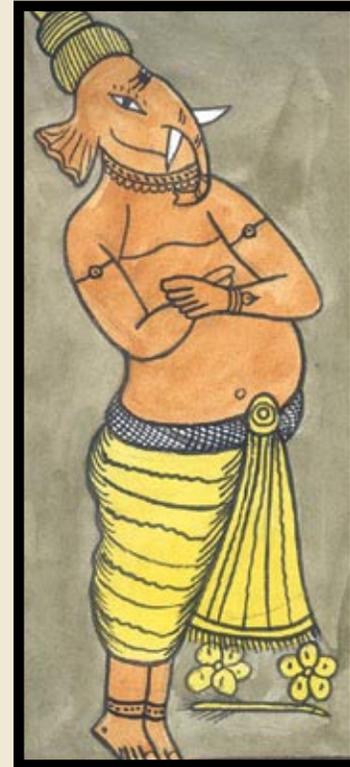


Ganesha loses a tusk.

Ganesha was a very devoted son. One of his main responsibilities was to not let any stranger enter his father's chambers. He took this task very seriously and whosoever wished to see Shiva, had to wait till permission was granted.

Parashurama, one of the incarnations of Vishnu was born on earth to teach the kings a lesson in kingliness. The Kings and their generals were ill treating the people. Parashurama had meditated on Shiva to be granted strength and he had been gifted the divine axe Parashu. This divine axe had enabled him to teach all the kings a lesson. He had cleansed the world of evil.

Parashurama came to mount Kailash to



...Ganesha loses a tusk.

offer his gratitude to Shiva. But Ganesha would not let him in. Parashurama was furious as he considered himself to be a devotee of Shiva who did not need permission to enter the sanctum sanctorum. He took his divine axe and struck Ganesha's tusk.

On hearing the awful sound, Shiva



...Ganesha loses a tusk.

and Parvati came out and scolded him for hurting their son and breaking his tusk. When Parashurama realized his offense he apologized profusely for his arrogance.



Ganesha the Writer

Ganesha became well known for his wit and wisdom. Meanwhile, Vyasa the sage was determined to write the epic Mahabharata. So he prayed to Brahma to grant him the power to do such a great work. Brahma appeared to Vyasa and told him about Ganesha. Accordingly, Vyasa approached Ganesha with an offer to be his assistant. But Ganesha put forth a challenge. He would be the scribe for Vyasa provided Vyasa dictated non stop! Vyasa accepted this demand with joy, and placed a counter condition that whatever he dictated, Ganesha must understand in its totality. So it began. Vyasa would first give a very complex verse, which would take Ganesha time to comprehend and



...Ganesha the Writer

write; Vyasa would follow these with a few simple verses, so that he could continuously think! And never allow Ganesha to stop writing. Ganesha used his broken tusk to write with, and so composed the longest epic in the world. The Mahabharata is considered by many to be a truly magnificent work. The Bhagawat Gita is a part of it.



Ganesha and the Cat

Ganesha was a naughty boy and like all little boys, he liked teasing animals. One day while playing, he saw a cat. He wanted to play with her but as you all know cats have a mind of their own and this cat was chasing a bird. He caught the cat's tail and pulled it. The cat spun around, scratched him, and mewed angrily. Both were hurt. Ganesha, covered in cuts, went to complain to Parvati about this wild cat. He found her hurt and covered in dust. He had never seen his beautiful mother in pain. He forgot about his own scratches and asked what had happened to her. She answered that she had changed herself into an animal, hoping to play with him but he had been very unkind. Animals, after all, she said, were also created by God and Shiva was known as Pashupati, the lord of the beasts.





Stories about Vishnu

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Vishnu the Preserver of the Earth

Vishnu the Green God

Vishnu - the granter of boons

Vishnu the fair husband

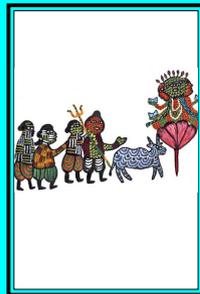
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Why Vishnu has so many Avatars?



Introduction

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Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



Vishnu the Preserver of the Earth



Bhoodevi, the earth goddess, drifted on the ocean. The sun shone on her by day and the moon reflected her graceful beauty. The waves washed over her, the droplets shining like sapphires. But lurking in the dark was gloomy Hrinayaksha, a demon who desired her purity. He plotted to grab her. One day, he got his chance. Between the hour of dusk and dawn, while she slept on a still sea, he dragged her down.



...Vishnu the Preserver of the Earth



Vishnu immediately saw the great wrong that was being committed. He changed himself to a monstrous boar, Varahara, and fought the demon deep in his lair on the floor of the ocean. Thus rescued, Bhoodevi became Vishnu's consort, companion and wife. It is said that the trees and plants, fruits and flowers are their progeny; that they brought plant life to Earth. In this way Earth became a garden, flourishing and feeding all who come to live on it.



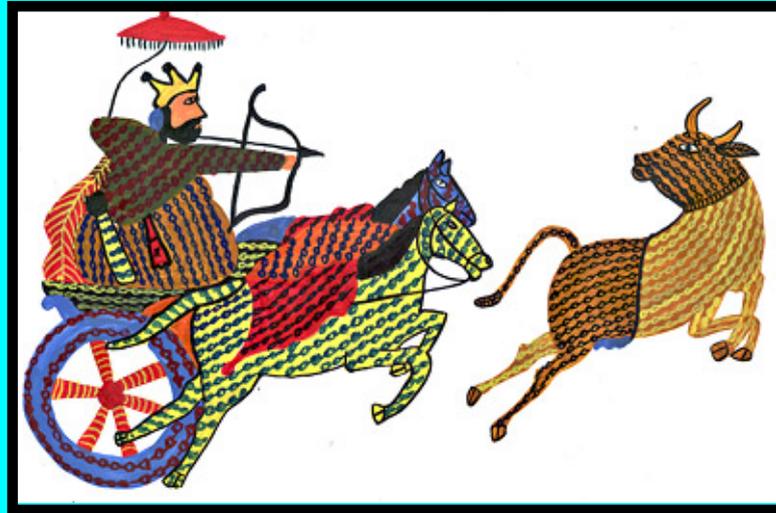
Vishnu the Green God



Not everyone was satisfied with his living on the Earth. The chieftain Vena was one such demon. He ceased to give respect to Vishnu and Bhoodevi. His people learned to plant and crop ceaselessly never letting the land fallow. They cut down whole forests and burned the ground. Fire and smoke filled the air. Flowers choked and died; animals lost their shelter, ponds ran dry. Bhoodevi became barren. The sages tried to stop Vena and eventually killed him. But nothing could stop the pillaging of the earth.



...Vishnu the Green God



The sages committed great austerities and sacrifices in an attempt to invoke Vishnu. Eventually, from the burning body of Vena there emerged a beautiful youth. He was Vishnu as Prithurestorer of the Earth. He begged Bhoodevi to have mercy and to restore the fecundity of the trees and forests. But she remained sullen. He pleaded with her and she threw a tantrum. She became a celestial cow and flew away. He said he would shoot her down and she replied that that would destroy the universe.



...Vishnu the Green God



Eventually, she relented to explain to him that it was in the hands of men to venerate and to respect her; that nothing could be done except according to the seasons and the matching of the the land and water and air. Prithu became a king, famous for the bounty of his kingdom and Prithu and the Earth is called Prithvi after him.



Vishnu - the granter of boons



Vishnu is associated with great and generous kings, insightful sages, and folk heroes. In these the favourite image is of him giving unhesitatingly of himself; granting boons to his devotees. No one is disconcerted to ask him - not even Lord Siva.

Vishnu promised to collect and offer Siva 1008 lotuses. He collected the flowers with difficulty wading in the waters. Siva quietly stole one flower. When Vishnu went to give the lotuses to Siva he found one short. Determined not to give an incomplete promise, he plucked out his eye and placed it among the flowers! Not even Siva expected this gesture. He was deeply affected. Siva gave Vishnu his Sudarshan Chakra, a magical weapon that could fly, cut off the head of a foe and return to Vishnu's hand.



Vishnu the fair husband



Along with Bhoodevi, the Earth goddess, Vishnu had another consort, Lakshmi or Shreedevi, goddess of wealth. They were opposites; one quiet and bounteous, the other, fickle, industrious, possessive. And both wanted Vishnu to be with them always.

Indra gifted the Parijat tree to Vishnu. It had magical properties; beautiful in every season, with fragrant flowers and lifegiving fruit. Indra obtained it when the oceans were churning and only gave it to Vishnu when the world was a settled place. When the Parijat flower was worn by a woman in her hair, her husband remained close to her; when the fruit was eaten, one remembered one's past through all the births and rebirths.



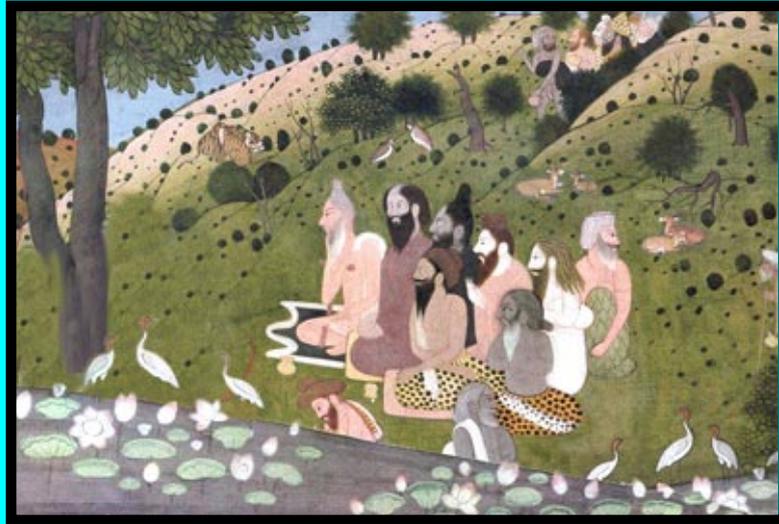
...Vishnu the fair husband



Soon as the tree came home to Vishnu's garden, both the wives wanted it for their own. A great quarrel ensued which was settled by Vishnu thus: he planted the tree in Bhoodevi's garden and tended it such that the flowers would fall into Shreedevi's lap! But this meant that Bhoodevi would look after the tree, water it and Shreedevi would have all the benefit. And so it was, except that the tree only flowers when Vishnu lives with Bhoodevi.



Vishnu - The God of Humility



There was a gathering of sages on the banks of the river Saraswati. They had assembled to perform sacrifices and offer prayers. Their discussion centred on the most controversial subject viz., who is the most humble out of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. The sages laid bets and each had a favorite. Now they really wanted to know who it would be. So they asked Bhrgu to call on all three and come back and narrate what occurred.



...Vishnu - The God of Humility



Bhrigu first went to Brahma's heaven. He did not pay his respects but barged in. Brahma was furious but held his peace because Bhrigu was his mind born son. Bhrigu then went to visit Shiva at Kailash. Shiva came forward to hug him as a brother, but when Bhrigu spurned the hug, Shiva was enraged. He grabbed his trident and was ready to hurl it when Parvati fell on her knees and reminded him that Bhrigu was a sage. Shiva's anger cooled off. Bhrigu then left for Vaikunt where Vishnu lay asleep in Lakshmi's lap. Bhrigu kicked Vishnu in the chest. Vishnu apologised for his rudeness that he was not awake to greet the sage and massaged the feet

that had walked so far to meet him. He then said that he was honored that the divine sage had left an imprint in dust on his chest. Bhrigu left immediately with tears in his eyes as he had never beheld such abject humility in a god. When he told the sages what had transpired, unanimously they agreed that Vishnu was the most gentle and humble god. Vishnu then rose from his abode, and with folded hands blessed the gathering of the sages on the sacred banks of the Sabarmati.



Why Vishnu has so many Avatars?



It had gone on for too long, the humiliating defeat of the demons by the gods. The demons were never able to upstage the gods and they were feeling very slighted. The demons thought of retiring from these battles when Sukra, who championed the demons cause offered to do a penance to Shiva for them. The fruit of the penance would be that they would be able to conquer the gods. But when Sukra left for Kailash to do his penance, the demons felt afraid.

Being cowards they went to Sukra's mother, and asked for her protection. She agreed and immediately went to Indra saying that if he attacked the demons while Sukra was doing his penance, she would herself fight and take his kingdom away. The gods were now in a knot. Sukra's mother was the great sage Brighu's wife and Indra was in terror of her wrath. Moreover, she was a goddess with the power that after continuous incantation of a sacred verse, every god could be made mere mortal.



...Why Vishnu has so many Avatars?



Faced with this threat Indra turned to Vishnu, who could not refuse his help. But when Vishnu tried to placate her, she refused. Worse, she began her long and profound incantation, leaving Vishnu little choice but to subdue her. What was he to do? He thought at length and then decided to kill her while she was uttering in the incantation. He hurled the discus at her and she was decapitated. Bhrigu could not believe that Vishnu had killed a woman, his wife and a goddess. He cursed Vishnu saying that since he intentionally killed a woman, he shall be born ten times amongst men. But the curse carried a blessing in that his birth amongst men would leave the world each time a better place.





Stories about Devi

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Slayer of the she-demon Daruka

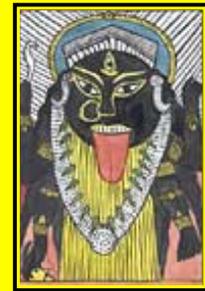
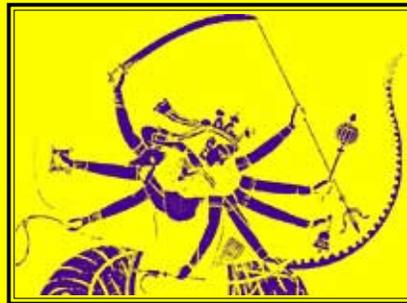
Durga, the saviour of Krishna

Why did Durga assume so many forms?



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Madhya Pradesh
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Creation of Devi



The king of the demons, Mahishasur was making life miserable for Indra and the other Gods. They approached Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva to get rid of Mahishasur. Hearing of their plight, the three of them and other gods combined their Powers into one. This resulted in the birth of an immense energy. The energy condensed into the Great Goddess, Devi. The Gods gave her their own weapons and pleaded with her to vanquish Mahishasura. The goddess agreed and proceeded to encounter Mahishasura and his multitude of demon armies.



...Creation of Devi



Mahishasura had been given the boon to change himself to any form he desired. As he changed his forms, Devi simultaneously changed into fierce forms. She slayed Mahishasura and his armies. Finally she produced her most fierce form — Kali — to kill and drink the blood of the demons. She ravaged through the battle field killing and devouring the demons.



...Creation of Devi



In the end she killed Mahishasura just as he was escaping from his buffalo form. But even after that Kali was still in a destructive frenzy. In order to pacify Kali, Shiva started dancing with her. He quietly lay down on the ground and in a mad frenzy Kali stepped on his body. Suddenly she was aware of herself and became pacified. The Gods then came to her with gratitude, and asked for her blessings.



Kali



Sita taunted Rama who was boasting about his victory over Ravana. She said that it was easy to kill a monster with ten heads but would Rama be able to kill a demon who had a thousand heads. Rama proudly retorted that he would take on any monster. Sita chided him and said that it was better if he stayed home. But now Rama's blood was pounding in his head and he decided to set off in pursuit of this creature. He dragged along his wife, brothers, soldiers and the monkey army.



...Kali



They set off for Satadwipa. Hanuman as usual went ahead to locate the monster's place and collect vital information. But when the army arrived with Rama at the head, the monster laughed scornfully. He shot three arrows. The first arrow scattered the monkey army. The second arrow drove the brothers to Ayodhya and the third arrow sent all the soldiers scurrying for cover. Rama was left alone open mouthed. Sita laughed at her husband's consternation and assumed the form of Kali. She took on the thousand headed demon. The battle was long and bloody, and lasted ten summers. Finally Kali killed him and drank his blood. She could not contain her joy at the victory and she began to dance and scatter his limbs.



...Kali



The universe shook at its centre because of her dancing and a great chasm opened. The gods were terrified. They begged Shiva to do something . Shiva lay down on the cracked land and begged her to stop, but Kali was so carried away that she stood with one foot on his thigh and the other on his breast. She was unaware on account of her jubilation. Then she looked down and was horrified at what she was doing. She stuck her tongue out and stood stock still. This is the abiding image of Kali. Sita then assumed her gentle form and left with her husband Rama . Shiva was thanked for saving the universe.



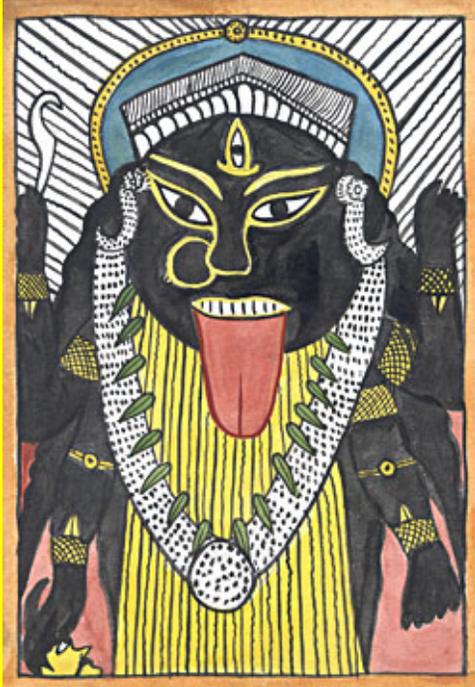
Slayer of the she-demon Daruka



Once there was a wicked female monster who was terrorizing the gods. Her name was Daruka and through prayer and penance she had obtained terrific powers. She was intent on demolishing the gods and the brahmanical world. She had as her companions other demonesses, and this prevented the gods from openly attacking her. Killing her and other women would heap sin upon them. They approached Shiva who requested Parvati to find a solution. Parvati was a fair woman and she realised that evil cannot be allowed to flourish, specially when it is shielded by civil conduct.



...Slayer of the she-demon Daruka



She created from her own blood a terrifying form- a black maiden with uncombed hair, an eye in her forehead, bearing a trident and a skull, astride a tiger. She was fearful to behold, but only to the demons; for the gods she appeared the saviour, for she soon set about killing the she demon Daruka. Parvati thus created Kali, she who killed the she-demon Daruka.



Durga, the saviour of Krishna



Durga was awarded a permanent place in the heavens as a goddess by Krishna. It is believed that Durga was Krishna's younger sister. She loved him very much and was ready to do anything for him. Kansa the wicked king of Mathura had made up his mind to kill all the male children as he was afraid of the prophecy which said that the eighth child of Devaki and Vasudeva would destroy him. Krishna asked Durga to take his place in Devaki's womb. Meanwhile he was born and was taken across the river to Vrindavan by his father. Kansa on hearing about the birth came to dash the baby against the rocks. But it was only Durga he found. The infant Krishna was saved. Durga became a goddess with her permanent abode on the Vindhya mountains and came to be worshipped with animal sacrifice.



Why did Durga assume so many forms?



Shumba and Nishumba were Giants who had performed countless austerities to become more powerful than the gods. Finally Shiva had to grant what they asked for and this was to be more powerful and richer than all the gods. Once they had been given this boon, they started on a life of plunder and conquest. The gods were reduced to penury and hard times. They had no authority and no dignity left. They went in a consortium to Brahma and Vishnu. Both Brahma and Vishnu replied that only Shiva could help them in their

misfortune. On approaching Shiva, he suggested that Durga alone would be able to assist them. They would have to offer prayers to her. Durga appeared to them and agreed to take on their battle. She first disguised herself as a maid carrying a vessel of water and walked through the praying gods.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



This was to test their sincerity and she saw that they were genuinely concentrating on her. She assumed her form (Durga) and decided on a plan. She wandered on Mount Himalaya as a beautiful goddess. On this mountain lived the envoys of Shumba Nishumba named Chanda Manda. When Chanda Manda saw her they were overwhelmed by her innocence and charm. Immediately they went to their masters and described the beauty of this lady. They also felt that such a person was an equal consort for Shumba Nishumba. The giant Shumba decided to send his special messenger Sugriva to negotiate with the goddess. He sang praises of Shumba and told her that the giant was in control of the universe and the gods were reduced to the status of slaves.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



The goddess replied that she would only marry someone who could defeat her in a battle. Sugriva got angry at the reply and said that she was a mere female and how could she dare to say this. She retaliated that this was her resolve. Sugriva went back and narrated to Shumba what had transpired. Shumba was consumed with rage and sent his army chief Dharma Lochan to tackle the goddess. When he encountered the goddess she let out an ear-splitting, terrible roar, and took on a ten armed form (Dasabhiya) which reduced him to jelly.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



The army was destroyed and a handful of soldiers ran back to tell the terrible tale. The two giants then sent their envoys Chanda Munda to fight the goddess. On the mountain they saw a woman with flowing hair (Muktakesi) sitting on an ass and laughing. She directed a glance at them and devoured their soldiers (Jagatdhatri). She grabbed Munda by his locks, cut his head off and drank the dripping blood (Kali). Chanda approached her next and now she appeared to be sitting on a lion (Singhavani). She despatched him and his army in much the same way. Now Shumbh, Nishumbh knew that they had to face her themselves. They went accompanied by a huge army of giants and demons. The gods were terrified and were biting their nails.



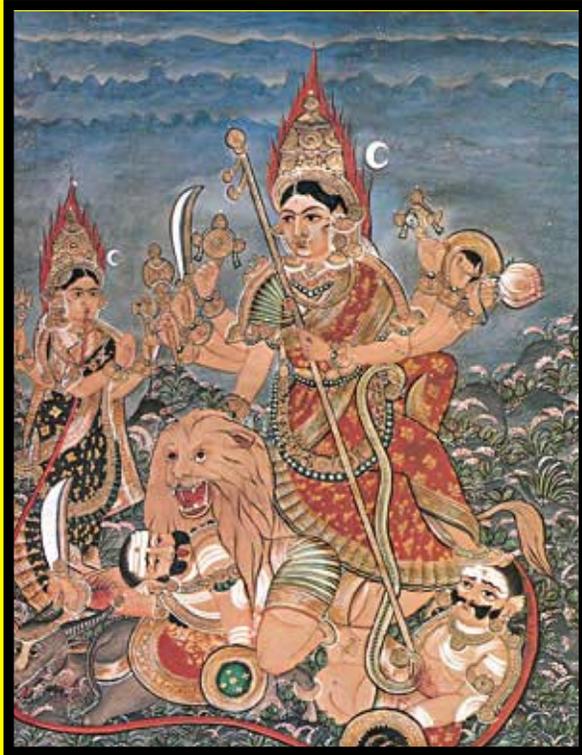
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The other goddesses came down to help Durga who looked calm and radiant. There were strange warriors and one terrible fellow, whose number kept multiplying every time a drop of his blood fell on the ground. He was Raktabija. The gods looked on from above trembling at the outcome. Now Durga assumed a new form (Chinna Mastika). She just kept drinking the giant Raktabijas blood before it fell to the ground. Raktabija was killed and so were the strange creatures who were formed from his blood drops. Finally Shumba and Nishumba had to face the goddess.



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



This time Durga entertained them as Kali. The battle was long and bloody. The outcome was that both the giants were killed, first Shumba (with Durga as Tara) and then Nishumba (with Durga as Mahishmardini and as ChinnaMastika).



...Why did Durga assume so many forms?



Kali sat down to drink the blood of her enemies and emerged in her golden form, bestowing blessings on the gods (Jagatgauri).





Stories about Parvati



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Parvati the Complete Woman

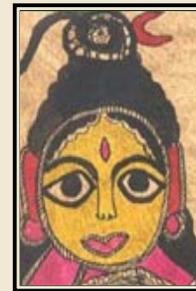
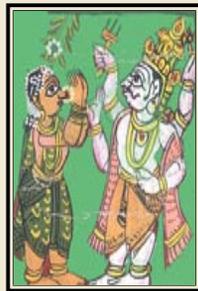
Parvati the Goddess of plenty.

Life on the move.



Introduction

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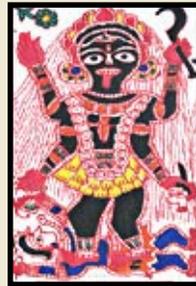
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Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



Mother of the Universe



Parvati overflows with the milk of maternal kindness. She never allowed herself to forget that she was a mother first and that all creatures in the world were born from a mother. In her previous incarnation as Uma, which means Mother of the Universe, Siva decided to put her through a test. Uma was in Samadhi and nothing could disturb her. The vagaries of the weather, the roar of the lions, and the trumpeting of the elephants left her unfazed. Suddenly there was a wailing sound of a baby in distress. Uma opened her eyes and ran like a deer towards the sound.



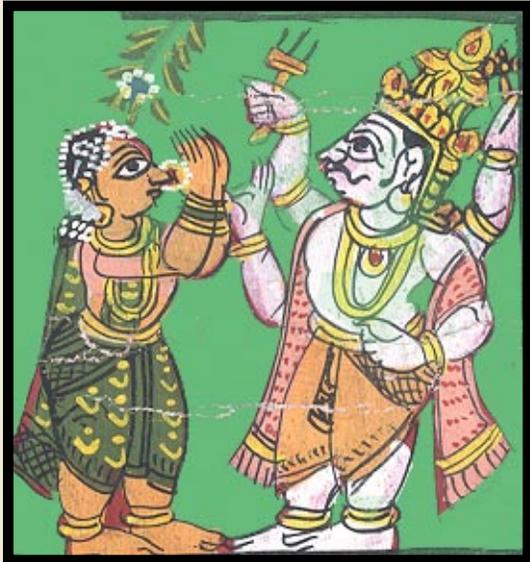
...Mother of the Universe



A crocodile was holding the baby in its mouth and diving into the water. Uma folded her hands and begged the crocodile to release the infant. The alligator looked at her scornfully and exclaimed that she was sacrificing her penance to obtain Siva's hand in exchange for a mere baby. Parvati nodded her head mutely, tears streaming down her cheeks, eyes closed. Then there was no infant, no crocodile and no pool. Siva stood there dressed splendidly before Uma. He spoke again, asking her to stop weeping as it was a test, an illusion.



...Mother of the Universe



He was testing her spirituality. He wanted to be sure that she still remained a compassionate human being first and foremost. That she even forgot that her samadhi was to win Siva's hand was ample testimony. She was ready to sacrifice it all to save a babe's life.



How Parvati assumed a man's name?



Durgam was a demon who had terrorised the world. Rivers had changed their course, flooding had occurred. All rituals had come to a stop. The Gods had to leave their celestial homes and live in the forests. The wives of sages had to sing the praise of Durgam. Durgam had been able to accomplish all this because he had prayed for many years to Brahma. His reward was that he had become a super power, master of the world by tyranny. He was an evil man and even the stars were afraid to shine. He had a wilful streak and spent his time tormenting nature. The seasons went away. There were mangoes in winter and apples in summer. The gods were in distress. So they went to Siva and sought his help. Surya wept that his effulgence had been taken away. Vayu cried that the air no longer blew to his command. Siva was moved by their problems and requested Parvati to assist them. She accepted with alacrity and decided to destroy Durgam.



...How Parvati assumed a man's name?



Her plan was to go step by step as Durgam was not only strong but very cunning. She sent Kalaratri, an exquisite maiden, who reduced to ashes many of Durgam's soldiers. Durgam was not to be outsmarted and he sent a cohort of giants who covered the surface of the earth. Kalaratri was petrified and she fled into Parvati's arms, followed by the giants. Durgam followed after the giants. A fight was inevitable. As they came closer, Parvati grew a hundred arms and produced a number of magical weapons. She kept hurling these at the army and at Durgam. She was invincible and at one point she planted her left foot on Durgam's chest. But he managed to extricate himself and continued with the flow of missiles. Parvati produced more soldiers from her body to continue in this battle.



...How Parvati assumed a man's name?



Durgam changed his shape to a huge elephant but Parvati shredded him with her nails which were like scimitars. He then transformed himself into a giant buffalo but Parvati was not cowed down. She forced him with her trident. However Durgam still had one more change of face up his sleeve. He became a giant with a thousand arms with a weapon in each hand. Parvati, undaunted, lifted him up and flung him on the ground. The fall which had been vicious did no harm to him. So she pierced him in the heart with a celestial arrow and he died.

From that day this form of Parvati is known as Durga, she who fights evil to restore the natural order.



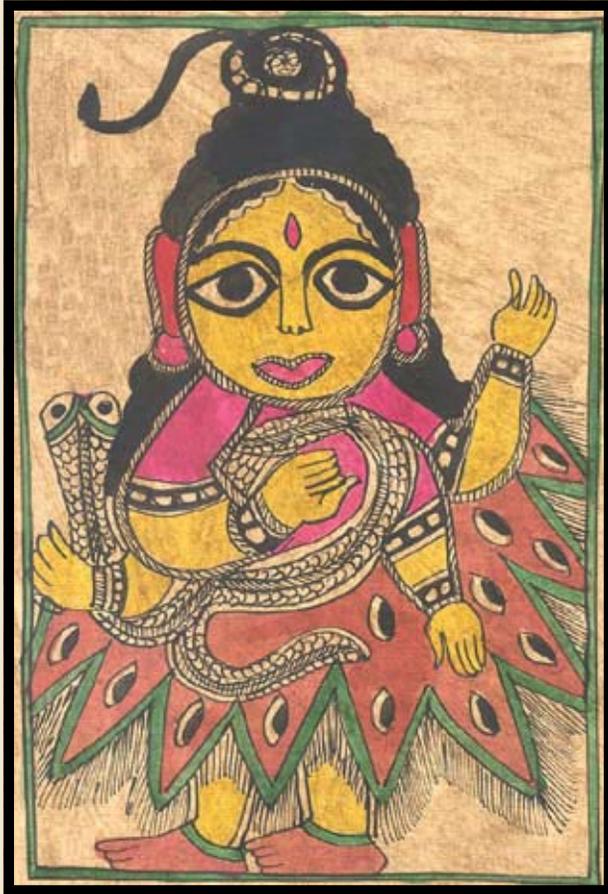
Parvati the Complete Woman



Parvati had won Siva's love by her intellect, determination and penance. She always remained his equal. They were very much in love but also their quarrels shook the universe. Vishnu and Brahma would confer with their consorts about their stormy relationship. Parvati had a child like innocence about her, which went very well with the ambiance of the cave in Mount Kailash. But one day Siva became weary of these innocent sports and went to meditate. Parvati was at a loose end and was terribly bored. Also she missed their daily game of dice, their trips on Nandi and her preparation of his evening smoke and meal.



...Parvati the Complete Woman



Vishnu her husband's best friend advised her to dress like a banjaran woman in bright colours and beads and dance and sing before Siva. Siva became so distracted with the jangling of the beads, the fragrance of sandal wood and roses and the music that he opened his eyes and smiled. Parvati lead him back to Kailash, love-struck.



Parvati the Goddess of plenty.



Once upon a time, Shiva said to Parvati, “Everything is an illusion. Nature, matter, and even food is only maya (illusion).” Parvati, the Goddess of material wealth, took offence. She disappeared from the world, challenging Shiva and others to make life function without her...



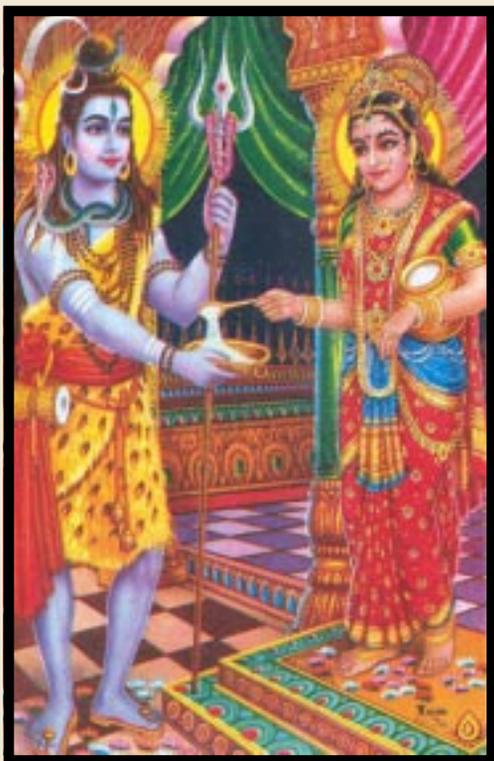
...Parvati the Goddess of plenty.



Chaos ensued in the universe. Time and the seasons did not move in their natural rhythm. The earth became a wasteland. Gods, demons and humans starved, as there was no food anywhere. Even Shiva felt the pangs of hunger. He then heard that Parvati was at Kashi, distributing food from a kitchen...



...Parvati the Goddess of plenty.

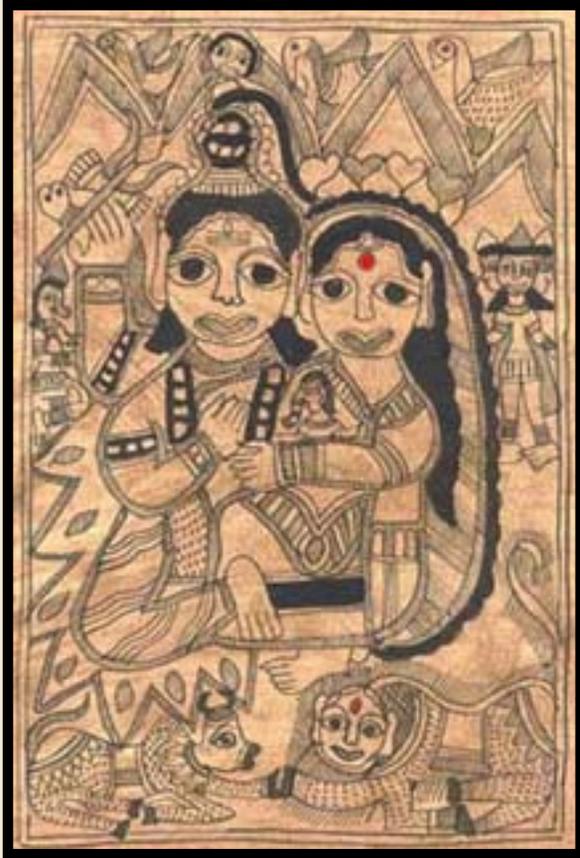


Hungry, like every other living being, he rushed to Kashi to be served by Parvati. Holding out his bowl to her, he admitted that the material world could not be ignored as an illusion. Having made her point, Parvati smilingly fed her husband with her own hands. From then onwards, she was known as Annapoorna, the goddess of food.

Parvati



Life on the move.



Parvati did great penance in order to marry Siva. But her married life had a strange aspect in that Siva was an ascetic at heart. He desired no one place as home, let alone build a palace of riches! So they wandered, crossing great valleys, camping by riversides; sometimes over mountains, sleeping in caves, sheltering from the cold by fires. All the time Parvati yearned for a home - a place in which to bring up her two children, Ganesh and Kartikeya; and to care for Siva's great brood of animals, Nandi, his bull, peacocks, rats, lions; and to host his attendants and fellow ascetics, with whom he conversed deep into the night, learning, teaching the secrets of the universe.



...Life on the move.

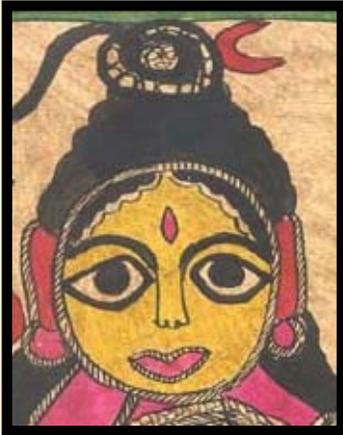


Eventually, she had her way. But Siva warned her that he was under a curse of Shani (Saturn) by which whatever house he built would crumble at the blowing of his own horn. Parvati built her palace by the waters of Mansarover, in sight of the snows of Kailash. Her joy knew no bounds.

One day, Siva went to visit crafty Shani. Shani welcomed him, congratulated him on his new home, in Mount Kailash. He said he was just going to do Aarti for Vishnu, would Siva join him. Siva did.



...Life on the move.



The Aarti proceeded, then Shani turned to Siva to blow on his great conch. Without any thought of the curse, Siva did just that and returned home to find his home shattered and Parvati in terrible grief.

Once again Siva determined to build a place for his family; this time a truly formidable palace.



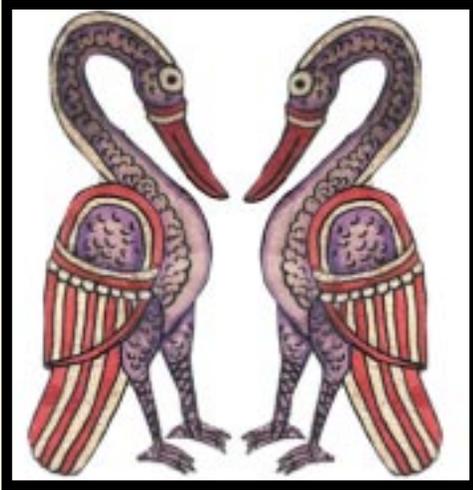
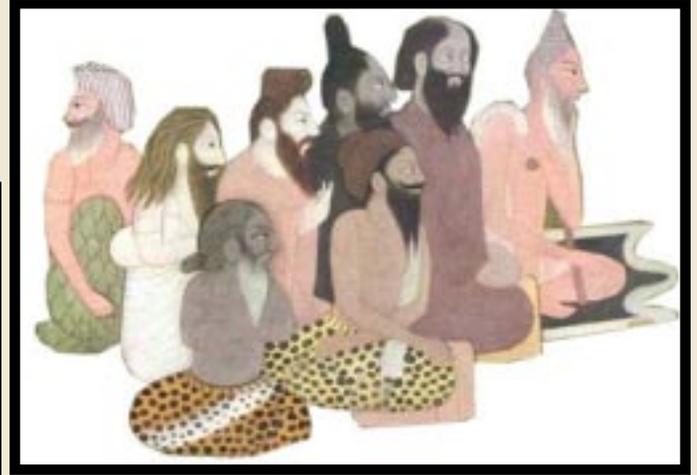
...Life on the move.



Designed by Vishwakarma, constructed by his ganas, it stood on open ground, grandly, like no other. To the house warming ceremonies came Ravana, a man so strong in his learning, so perfect in his attainments, that all the priests bowed before him to conduct the havana. When it ended, Parvati was so pleased that she begged Ravana to demand any Dakshana (gift) and she would do everything to give it to him. For all Ravana's great learning, he was arrogant and greedy. He could not bear that Siva have such a perfect home, so, of course, he asked for it.

Since then, the Siva Parivar lives a life on the move. If they visit your door, be sure to recognize them and make a wish.





Stories about Rishis

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Rishis



Introduction

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Rishis



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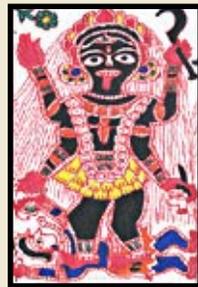
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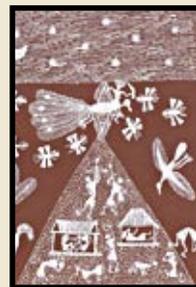
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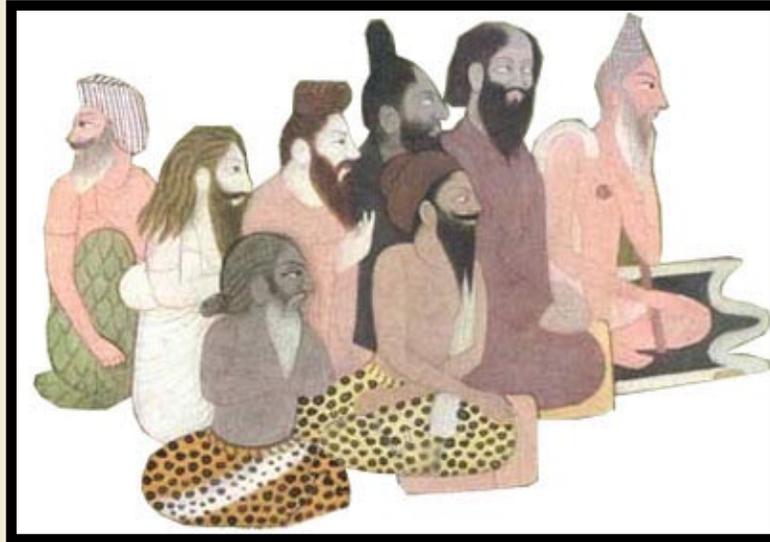
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Madhya Pradesh
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RISHIS, SAGES, and POETS

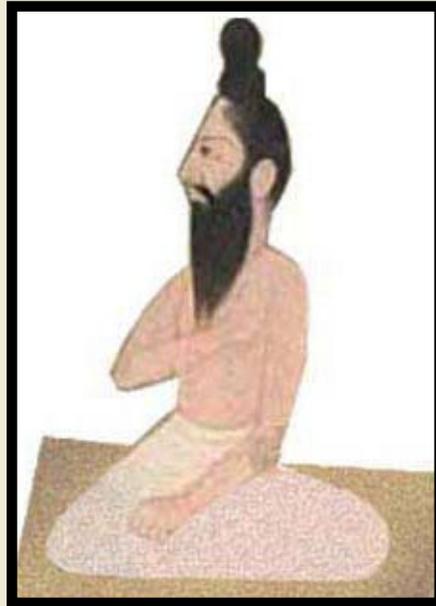


The Rishis are important players in the Hindu scriptures. They are described as poets to whom the four Vedas were revealed. They were learned men who performed austerities, knew the ritual practices, and through penance and prayer answered the questions of gods and men.

The names and tales of Brigu, Pulastaya, Daksha, Vashishta, Vishwamitra, Vyasa, Valmiki, Narada, remain even today in everyday memory. Though not deities, some of them are regarded as the mind-born sons of Brahma, who, at the dawn of creation brought forth both the population and the social order.



BRIGHU



Brighu was one of Brahma's mind-born sons and a prajapati, one of the first fathers. He was the officiating priest at Daksha's great sacrifice to which Shiva and Sati were not invited. He sided with Daksha in humiliating Shiva and as a consequence, one of Shiva's ganas chopped off his flowing beard.



Rishis



...Brighu



Bhrigu had an eye for beautiful women. He spotted a maid who was betrothed to a demon. He was moved by her beauty and married her. The demon was distraught and approached Agni for help. Agni helped him find the maid and had her carried home. Brigu was furious and cursed Agni saying that each time that he, Agni, lost control and got angry he would devour everything, Agni remonstrated. He had only spoken the truth and done his duty. The curse for not doing one's duty was already severe - seven preceding and seven succeeding generations would have been cast

into the nether world. He added that he too had the powers to curse but he respected the sage as the mouthpiece of the gods. Also, at the sacrifices, it is the sage who has to pour the ghee over Agni. How then could he curse him? Brigu heeded the reason in this and tempered the curse saying that Agni would also purify all that passed through him



...Brighu



Brighu also did a good and kind act. Divodasa, the king of Kasi was defeated in a battle. His whole family was slaughtered by one Vitahavya. The unhappy king went to the sage Bharadvajya who conducted a sacrifice for him. The result was that an heir, Pratardana was born to him. Pratardana vowed to take revenge on Vitahavya. Vitahavya fled to the hermitage of Brighu for protection. Pratardana approached Brighu and asked him to give up his enemy. Brighu replied that there are no warriors in a hermitage. Pratardana touched his feet for this learning and went on to become a good and kind king of Kasi and to become a chanter of the Vedas.



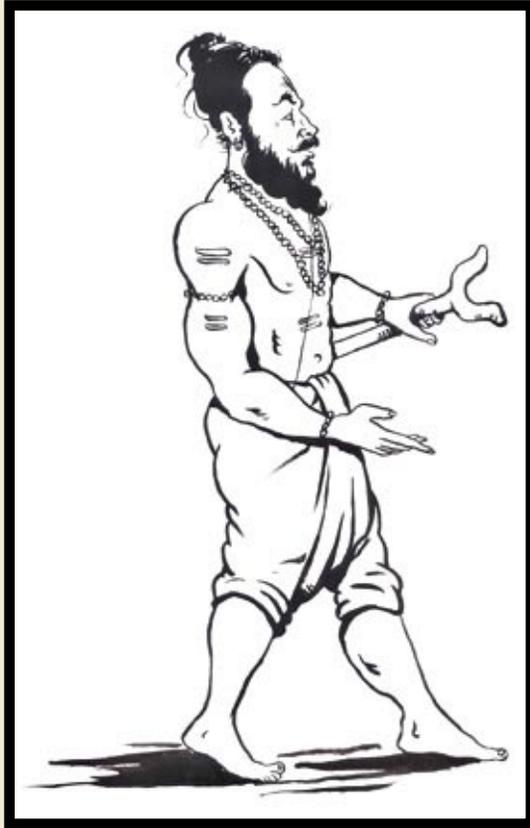
...Brighu



Brighu was also very caring about his fellow sages. Once an evil king Nahusha obtained superhuman powers such that at his one glance people were reduced to becoming his slaves. Nahusha went to the sage Agastya and soon had him bound hand and foot. He then tied Agastya to his chariot and kicked him to make him move. Agastya called for help and Brighu heard. He hid in Agastya's hair to avoid Nahusha's burning and evil gaze. Unseen by Nahusha, he pronounced a great curse and Nahusha fell from the heavens, an ugly brown snake on earth, to be hated by men for all time.



Pulastaya



Puyalasta was the rishi through whom the gods communicated the Puranas to mankind. But first he had to find one who was worthy. This was Parasara, son of Shakti, son of Vashishta the sage. One day King Kalmashapada encountered Shakti on a winding path in the forest and ordered him out of the way. When the sage refused, telling the king to be more polite, he was delivered a merciless whipping. Shakti cursed the king saying he would turn cannibal and a mindless rakshasa..So terrible was the power of the curse that no sooner was it said than King Kalmashapada turned and killed and ate up Shakti ! And in complete madness, he followed up the feast by eating all of Shakti's one hundred brothers.



Rishis



...Pulastaya

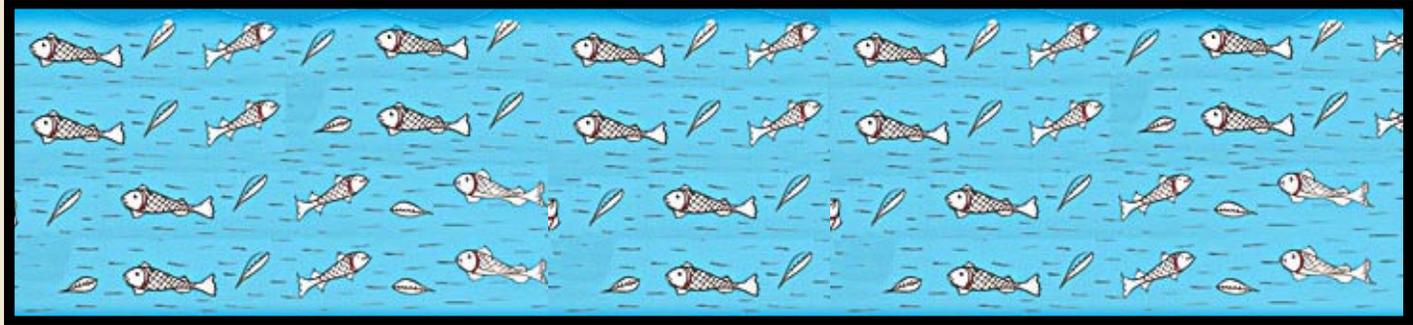


Parasara was born after this terrible event in his family and was brought up by Vashishta, his grandfather. He was taught the skills of war, the secrets of the body and the practice of the rituals. Thus he became a ferocious warrior and

wrecked havoc and carnage on the rakshasas of the world. Eventually, his grandfather stopped him, saying that for all his savagery, his family would not return as this was destiny, both of his fathers and of the rakshasas. So it was that Parasara went to the ashram of sage Pulastaya and was taught the Puranas. He married Prithi and had two sons, Agasthya and Visarava, and in this way the Puranas came to mankind.



Daksha



There are many stories about Daksha's origin. He too was a mind born son of Brahma. It is he who sprang from Brahma's right thumb and was married to the woman who sprang from Brahma's left thumb. The other origin is that he was born from the ten Prachetas. The Prachetas were the sons of a famous warrior named Prachinverhis. He was so named because he had planted on the earth sacred grass facing the sun. He performed fervent prayers, after which he married Savarana, the daughter of the ocean who bore him ten beautiful sons. They were great warriors and knew all there was to know about warfare. They in turn practiced austerities and remained on the ocean bed for ten thousand years. They observed this penance because Brahma had said to their father that this was the way to be able to increase the human race.



...Daksha



While the Prachetas were lost in their meditation, there was an upset of the ecological balance. The foliage on earth became dense, sunlight could not reach the people. There was darkness and the wind choked in the impenetrable forests. The Prachetas on opening their eyes saw this. They opened their mouths, and fire emerged from there and the fire burnt the trees. But now the earth would become bare and brown if the fire was not stopped. They were placated by Soma, king of the vegetation, who offered them the beautiful maiden Marisha. Marisha, in another life, had been promised by Vishnu that she would have ten brave and fearless husbands. And so from this union of Marisha and the ten Prachetas a son named Daksha was born, with a boon from Brahma that he would be a prajapati and would populate the earth with a thousand sons.



Rishis



...Daksha



The next part of Daksha's story is that his thousand sons were tricked by Narada not to have children ! He had another thousand sons and again Narada coerced them not to procreate. Daksha was enraged. By a great sacrifice and terrible austerities he cursed Narada, who was then unable to stop his sons from having children from the sixty daughters that Daksha produced from his mind. This brought peace and tranquillity on earth and Daksha was given the title of the chief of the Prajapatis.



...Daksha



Daksha's daughter Sati married Shiva. This Daksha never accepted for Shiva did not much conform to the rituals and regulations which Daksha insisted on as Chief of the Prajapatis. He never accepted his son-in-law and chose every opportunity to humiliate Shiva. At one great sacrifice, he omitted to invite Shiva but unfortunately Sati was so aggrieved that she came uninvited. Thoughtlessly Daksha heaped abuse on her and Shiva. Hurting her so much that she leaped into the sacrificial fire.

Shiva's grief and anger was unimaginable; he brought catastrophe down upon all who had gathered in Daksha's yard. The mountains shook, the earth trembled and the sea sent up gigantic waves. Indra tripped and fell. Yama broke his staff. Saraswati and the Matris had their noses cut off. The moon got badly bruised. Brigu lost his beard. The Brahmans ran helter-skelter.

Daksha had to accept the supremacy of Shiva; of his way of life; of his teaching. But in the fracas Daksha was decapitated and even though he was forgiven, he had to forever live with a ram's head.



VASHISTHA



According to a hymn in the Rigveda Agastaya and Vashistha were born from the seed of Varuna and Mitra, primordial mind born children of Brahma, jointly called Aditya. At a sacrificial feast they met Urvashi, the first dawn. Their seed fell in many places, on the water, on the ground and in a jar. Vashistha was born from the ground and Agastaya was born in the jar.



Rishis



...VASHISTHA



There are several tales attributed to Vashishta. One day Vashishta returned from a three day fast in the forest and found a fierce dog guarding Varuna's home. He was hungry and could not wait to get in, but he did not want to argue with the dog. So he sang a hymn which lulled the dog to deep slumber. This hymn is in the Rig Veda and even today is invoked by burglars.

Vashishta was a family priest for many kings. King Saudasa was one amongst them. One day the king went out hunting and killed a tiger. But suddenly the tiger disappeared and left the king baffled. It was actually a rakshasa in disguise. A few days later the king asked Vashishta to conduct a prayer and sacrifice. While Vashishta was out busy preparing all the proper items for the ceremony, the rakshasa came in disguised as a cook. Then the cunning rakshasa took out human flesh which he carried with him, and placed it in the pots to cook.



...VASHISTHA



Vashistha returned to the site and the king politely offered him the victuals. Vashistha by the power of his meditation recognised it as human flesh. He was enraged and cursed the king saying that he would be in a similar situation one day and would actually eat human flesh. The poor king was aghast. Vashistha realised what had happened, but now it was too late; he could only temper the curse by saying that it would be only for twelve years. But it was enough: it was this very king who ate the sage Shakti and his brothers, all sons of Vashishta. The story does not end here.



...VASHISTHA



Another version is that Viswamitra who was Vashistha's rival cast a spell on the king. Vashistha was heart broken. He tried to end his life in many ways but he could not succeed. Miraculously he stayed alive - when an avalanche from Mount Meru fell on him, the rocks turned to cotton. He went through a forest in flames, but not a hair was synged. He tried other methods, everything failed. He returned to his hermitage a broken man where he encountered the king turned rakshasa, who attempted to gobble him up. Vashistha then relieved him of the curse. Now the king was free at last but no one could forget that all this happened to good men at the mischief of a rakshasa. Perhaps it was the doing of Vishwamitra.



VISHWAMITRA



Vishwamitra was one of the seven rishis. He was born a Kshatriya who was accepted as a Brahmin because of his intense meditations. He occupied a very important position in the RigVeda and he is associated with the famous Gayatri Mantra.



Rishis



...VISHWAMITRA



The disputes between Vishwamitra and Vashishta are told in the Puranas. Once Vishwamitra went to the ashram of Vashishta. He was treated royally and every desire of his was met. Still, he coveted Vashishta's cow Kamadhenu which granted all material desires. He tempted her with much treasure, but she refused to accompany him. He tried to take her by force with his soldiers but Kamadhenu conjured up more soldiers. Vashishta entered the fray with his hundred sons. A battle ensued which Vishwamitra roundly lost. He determined to become Vashishta's equal through prayers and penance.



...VISHWAMITRA



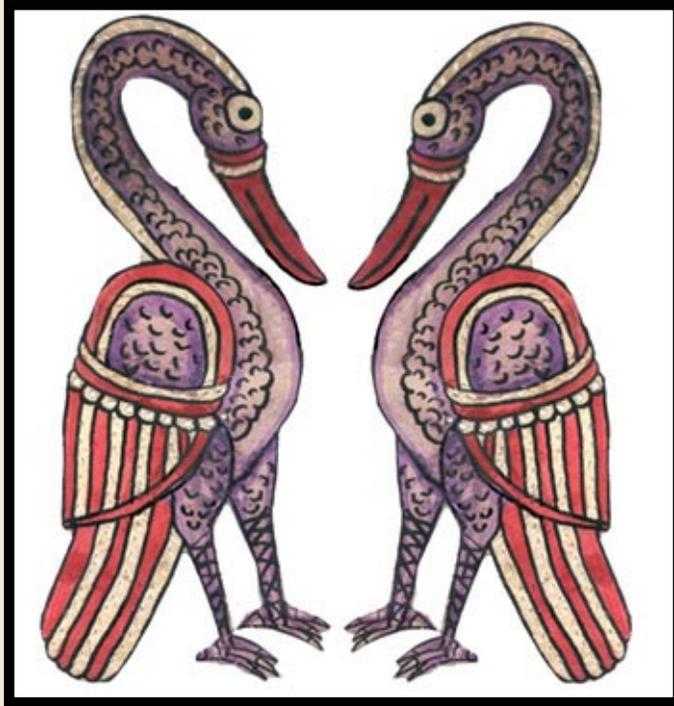
While he was engaged in these penances, he became connected to a certain prince who had been banished for twelve years by his father because he had tried to ravish a woman of good virtue. While in exile, the prince lived with and took care of Vishwamitra. Once during a terrible storm, the prince was undergoing a silent fast, and the sage himself was praying. Kamadhenu the cow came by. Such was their craving that they overcame the magical cow and killed her. Vashitha was disgusted and gave the prince the name Trisankhu which means guilty of three sins ; the sin for which he was in exile;the sin of breaking one's avowed penance and the sin of killing a cow.



Rishis



...VISHWAMITRA



cursed each other to become birds and plucked out each others eyes and feathers. Then Brahma intervened and forced them to accept each other as equals.

Vishwamitra agreed to give him a boon and he asked to be admitted into the heavens. Vishwamitra granted his request as he himself had become a rishi through his severe austerities but Vashistha would not agree. While the two went through long arguments, poor Trishanku was left nowhere, neither a prince, nor a sage, nor allowed to enter the heavens. Eventually Brahma reconciled the two rishis explaining how each had arrived at their views through ardent penance, and both could live in the Cosmic order. Vishwamitra was Rama's guru when he went to the Swayamvar which Raja Janak arranged for his daughter Sita. In one of their battles they



Rishis



Vyasa

Writer of the Mahabharata

Vyasa is a title given to many Rishis. The name means arranger. The Vyasa referred to most often is the writer of the Mahabharata.

He is also the father of Dhritarashtra and Pandu whose progeny fought the Mahabharata.

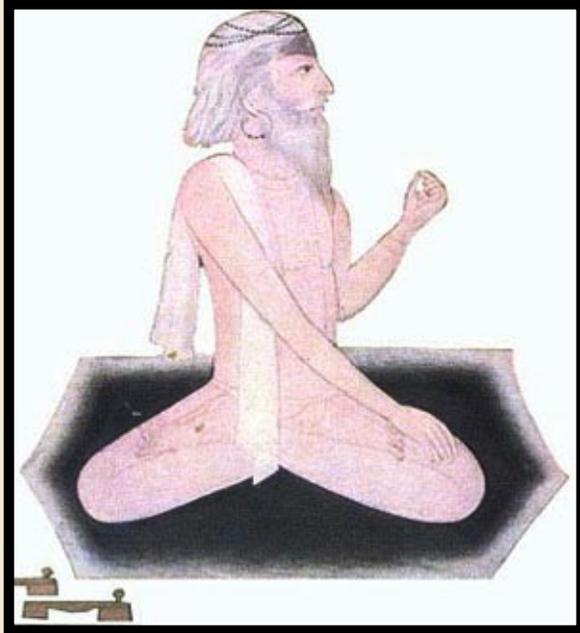


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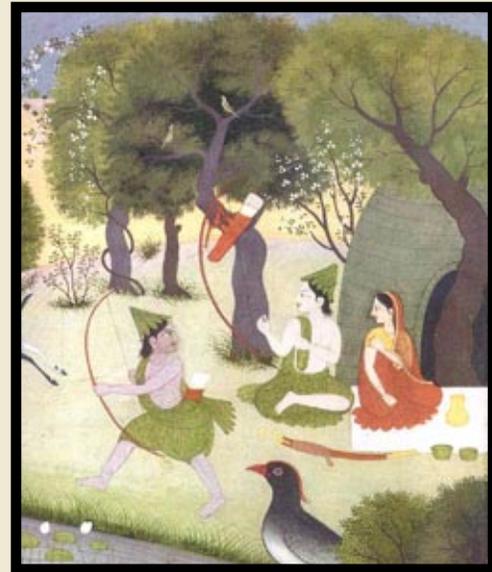


Valmiki

Writer of the Ramayana.



Valmiki is the author of the Ramayana. Sita and her twin sons, Luv and Kush stayed at his ashram in Chitrakut. He was their teacher.



Rishis

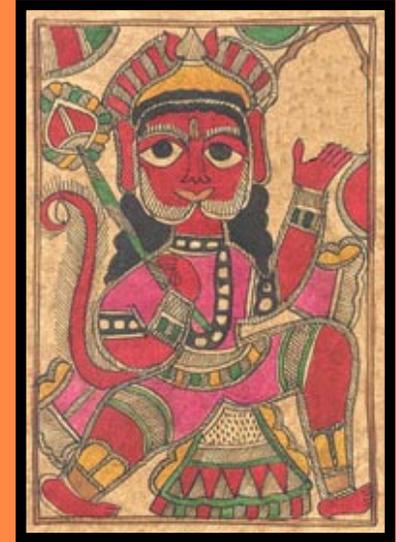
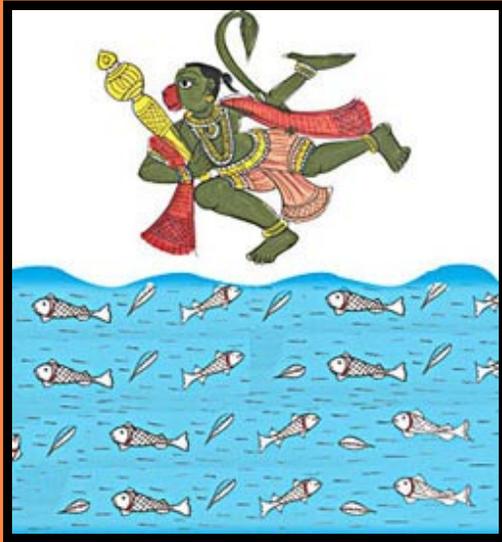


Narada

The Trouble Maker.

Narada was regarded as the messenger of the gods. By some sources he is considered Brahma's son and a Prajapati, one of the first fathers. He was a meddler in people's affairs and to this day someone who is a busybody is called NaradaMuni. He was responsible for placing a curse on Daksha's sons so that they could have no children. He informed Kansa of Krishna's approaching birth and that led to the mass slaying of male infants. Thereafter he became a devotee, friend and companion of Krishna. He was the creator of the Veena, which is a musical stringed instrument, delightful to the eye and the ear. He was very vain about his ability to create music. One day Krishna placed his Veena in the paws of a bear. The bear started playing it and it produced even sweeter strains than Narada. Narada was duly silenced by this celestial show.





Stories about Hanuman

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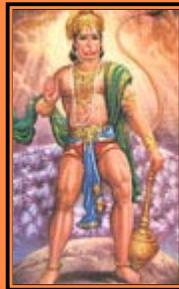
Hanuman sets Lanka in flames.

Hanuman brings Sanjeevi Hill.



Introduction

Our gods and goddesses have strong and vibrant personalities as described in the hymns of the Vedas and the stories in the Puranas. Most Hindus have heard these stories in childhood and have an easy familiarity with the ways of life and living that the gods display in their various Avatars. There is always a take-away message in the stories - sometimes it is ambiguous and leads to more questions; sometimes the message simply defines good and evil, right and wrong - but always, there is the possibility of relating to ones own personality and ones own situation. No doubt, this is why the stories have endured. I for one carry a sense of comfort that there is a special god/goddess to recall in a certain situation. The stories actually hold our faith, allowing us to accept all the gods as one and the one god as many.



There is also the matter of images. In a way the images of India - the great idols in worship, the wayside shrines, the calendar art images, the great and the small sculpture - are abstraction of the stories and the personal message of the stories.

In this book, written entirely for the web, the stories have been cast in a simplified mould. The intent is to familiarize the new visitor and to aid recall for the old friend.

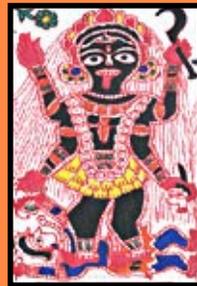
All the images were commissioned by me with Tribal and Folk Artists. We had only to tell them the story and they drew the pictures. They knew the stories! Language was no barrier. Some readers may be familiar with the styles of Indian Folk and Tribal Art and will instantly recognize the Madhubani, the Warli, the Oriya and Bengal folk art . For others, given below is a chart :

An attempt is made in the stories to show the harmony between the gods and goddess; time coalesces and the gods are present at each others life events, a general value system emerges; the invocation is of god love rather than god fear.

We hope the reader enjoys this presentation of ancient text and is encouraged to delve deeper into our well of faith.



Andhra leather puppet and folk art



Madhubani style



Bengal folk art



Warli style



Madhya Pradesh
tribal art



Hanuman's Birth and Name



Hanuman's parents were Anjana, a celestial nymph and Vayu, the god of the winds. Both were very beautiful people. Anjana was a celestial nymph who had been banished from the heaven to earth. She had been cursed to assume a monkey form. One day while wandering on the mountains Vayu spotted her in her original form. He was enchanted by her grace. She trembled like a leaf in his arms and told him that she was already wedded. How could she be unfaithful? Vayu reassured her that his love was pure and he would give her a son who would be strong, brave and mighty.



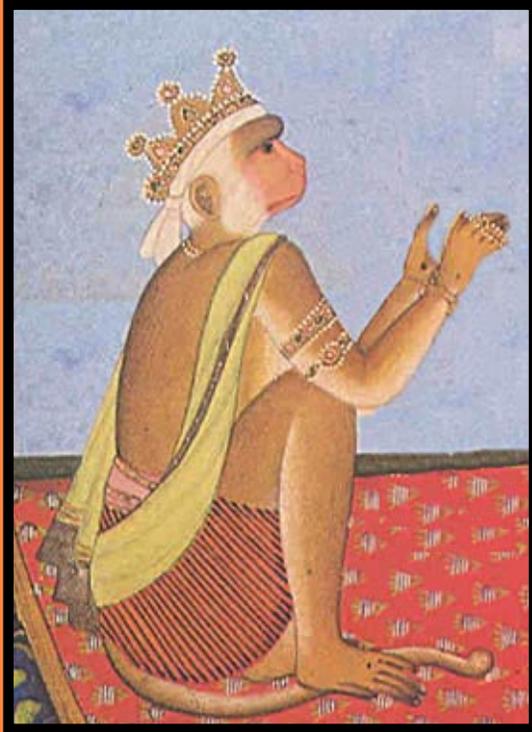
...Hanuman's Birth and Name



A son was born to Anjana. He was naughty and one day when he saw the sun, he thought that it was an orange and he jumped to grab it. Indra saw this and was afraid of so fearless a child. He let loose a thunderbolt which smashed the boy's cheek and left his jaw elongated. Thereafter he was called Hanuman, the long jawed one. His father Vayu was furious that his son had been burnt and he stopped blowing. The gods were terrified as everything came to a stand still. It looked like a petrified universe. They approached Brahma for help and he gave Hanuman the boon of never being killed in a battle or ever again being hurt by Indra's bolts, if he would be modest celibate and would help Ram to rescue Sita and defeat Ravana.



Hanuman flies over the ocean



Sita was kept a prisoner in the land of the demons, a hundred miles (yojanas) across the ocean. How was anybody to cross the seas and come back with information about her ? The monkey army could not do it. Jambavat, the king of the bears was old and he would only be able to swim 90 miles one way. He would not be able to accomplish the return journey. Hanuman was sitting, nodding his head.



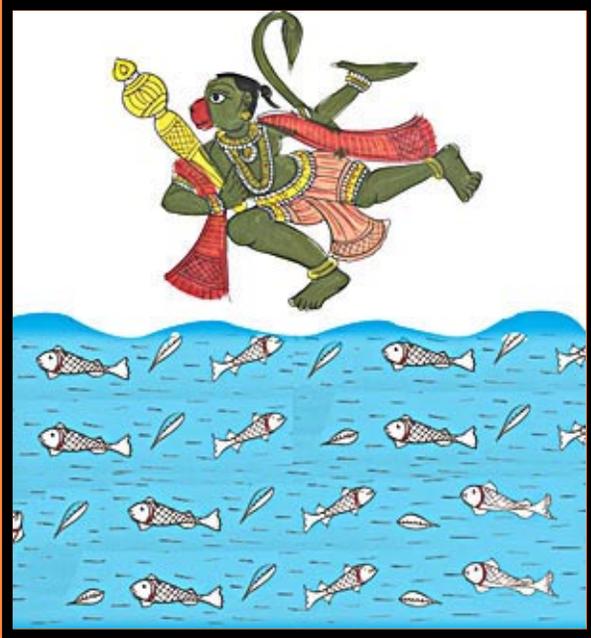
...Hanuman flies over the ocean



Jambavat looked at him and said that he was the one who could leap across the ocean. The old bear king stumbled across to Hanuman and told him to go. He said that he was strong and young and could do anything. Jambavat recalled his own brave deeds, how he had assisted in the churning of the oceans long, long ago and how he had fetched the herbs for purifying the waters when they calmed. Now only Hanuman was the ray of hope for Rama. Even while Jambavat was praising him, Hanuman started increasing in size. The monkey army were filled with awe at the radiance which emanated from his great body.



...Hanuman flies over the ocean



He prayed to the Gods. He bowed to the east, touched Vayu's feet and headed south. He flew on his mission with the speed of Ram's arrows. From tree to tree he leapt, spreading the flowers about in the wind, an image of Rama steadfast in his mind. When he came to the ocean shore, he leapt fearlessly and the wind picked him up and then he was flying over the water like a comet. On his way a huge mountain arose from the ocean floor.



...Hanuman flies over the ocean



Hanuman struck the mountain aside as he would a wisp of a cloud. The mountain begged him to rest his limbs saying he too was a disciple of Rama . Then the ocean spoke saying, come rest and he would offer him great hospitality. But Hanuman expressed his urgency as Sita was in distress. He flew on and came across a monster with a gaping mouth. The monster bid him to enter as she had not eaten for a long time. Hanuman grew larger and larger and so did the monster's mouth. Hanuman then played his trick; he reduced himself to a speck, entered the mouth and flew out. She at once recognized him as the devotee of Rama and blessed his mission. He continued flying but now he found himself

being rocked back and forth.

He looked down and saw a she demon had caught his shadow. She beckoned him with open mouth. Hanuman entered her gaping mouth and came out of her stomach, scattering her intestines. She drowned in a pool of blood in the sea. In this way, at last he came to Lanka, the emerald island. But where was Sita? How would he find her without letting the monsters and demons know about his mission? He reduced himself to the size of an ordinary monkey and continued his quest for Sita.



Hanuman's Quest for Sita



Hanuman arrived at the gates of Lanka. He was stopped by the guardian goddess. She asked him who he was and he replied that he was a little monkey who wanted to see the wondrous sights of Lanka. She kicked him in the stomach and Hanuman casually responded by hitting her with his left hand. She doubled over and remembered an ancient curse that when a monkey struck her, the guardian spirit of the city, Lanka would be destroyed. So she knew that that time had come and she had to choose her role in it. She let Hanuman in through a side entrance.



...Hanuman's Quest for Sita



Hanuman was enchanted by the city. It was so beautiful. There were coloured fountains playing, gardens everywhere, birds chirruping, and stately men and women dressed in iridescent clothes. The houses were opulent with gold and stones and cloth. The air was filled with chants from the Vedas, of which Ravanna was a renowned master. Finally he came to Ravana's palace. It had caparisoned elephants and horses outside. There was a

park of such beauty that Hanuman could only gaze awe struck. He brought his musings back to the ground and continued into the palace. Where would he find Sita and how would he recognise her? He saw the Pushpak Viman and the tree which granted all desires and knew that Ravana was somewhere close at hand. He entered Ravana's chambers and there he saw the Rakshasa sleeping, surrounded by beautiful women. Ravana looked every inch a monarch .



...Hanuman's Quest for Sita



surrounded by a high wall. He meditated on Rama and decided to look there. He was just a little monkey and he stood on the high wall and looked below. His heart filled with joy and he felt a surge of hope coursing through him.

Hanuman knew that Sita was not there. Now there was a doubt in his mind had Sita been killed by Ravana because she would not give in to him? He looked in all the bed chambers, but there was no Sita. He went into many gardens but could not find her. He was grief stricken and did not dare to think of the consequence if he failed. What calamities would happen if Rama could not recover Sita. Just then, in the distance he saw a small garden



...Hanuman's Quest for Sita



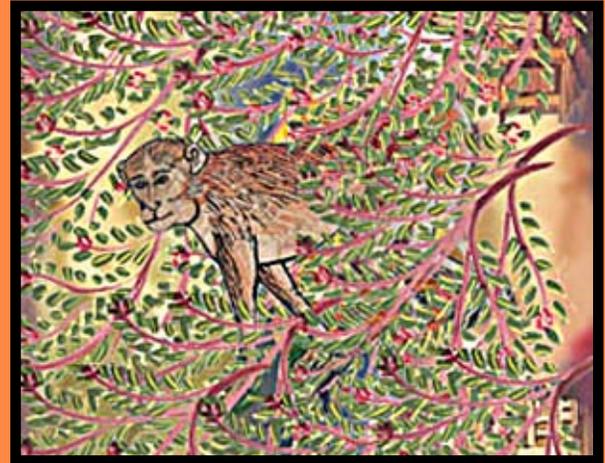
There was a figure seated under a tree. He could feel the palpable sorrow emanating from her. Tears were streaming down in the moon light on her cheeks. She did not even try to wipe them with her dusty sari. There were female monsters surrounding her. She was like a weeping statue asking for no pity. Hanuman knew he had found Sita. Now he resolved to approach her and waited for an opportunity. It soon became dawn and Ravana once more approached Sita. Would she marry him, he who was master of the sacred knowledge, wealthier than all, protected by boons. Sita trembled like

a leaf and closed her ears to his adoration. She told him that she could never be his wife as she was already the consort of Rama. Rama would protect her and Ravana would be destroyed. Ravana was enraged at this insolence and threatened to have her cooked and fed to the lady monsters. Sita warned him about his dastardly act and his evil ways. Ravana left in a rage.



...Hanuman's Quest for Sita

The lady monsters were told to convince Sita and they set about haranguing and harassing her. Hanuman was hearing all this and he knew that he had to act. Sita in the meanwhile suddenly felt unafraid. Hanuman started singing the story of Rama in a bell like voice perched on the tree. Sita looked around to see who this creature was who knew the whole history with such accuracy and detail. She saw a tiny monkey sitting on a branch above her. Could it be the son of Vayu or was her mind playing tricks. She knew she was not dreaming. Her eyes were open. She prayed to the gods that he be Rama's messenger.



...Hanuman's Quest for Sita



As soon as she did that Hanuman stood before her with his hands folded. The guards lay asleep around her. Sita addressed him as her son and said that it was she. It was ten months that she was a captive of Rama and only two more months remained. If she was not rescued by then, she would kill herself. Hanuman reassured her of Rama's determination to destroy Ravana and bring her back. Sita was like a doe fearful of being deceived. Hanuman gave her Rama's ring, which Sita pressed to her eyes with joy. After comforting and reassuring his queen, Hanuman sat down to think.



Hanuman sets Lanka in flames.



Hanuman realized that the time had come to draw Ravana's attention to himself. He became the naughty monkey that he was and played his old tricks. He threw fruit at passersby, jumped into balconies and broke furniture. He stole jewels and strung them on the trees. Soon a big gang was chasing him with sticks and stones. He was caught and brought before Ravana. Ravana sat on his throne, an imperial, god like figure. Hanuman thought to himself as to what pride can do to a

great human being. The line between good and evil was fine and Ravana had transgressed it. Hanuman said to Ravana that he had come as Rama's envoy. He must release Sita or he would bring about his own destruction. Ravana was angry at hearing this but he would not kill Hanuman as he was keen to let Rama learn of his cruelty.



...Hanuman sets Lanka in flames.



He decided that since a monkey's most prized possession was his tail, they would set fire to it. Ravana's servants wrapped his tail in rags and set it on fire. Sita in Asoka Vana was told what was being done to Hanuman. She prayed to Agni that he should allow the fire to be cool to Hanuman. Hanuman was paraded through the streets with his tail in flames but he did not feel any pain. He realised that Agni was being kind to him. He decided to teach the monsters of Lanka a lesson. He shrank and shook himself loose of his bonds and then assumed his huge shape with the burning tail. He broke a pillar from a mansion and leapt from roof to roof waving his tail above. The monsters and their families were terrified - whatever his tail touched burst into flames.



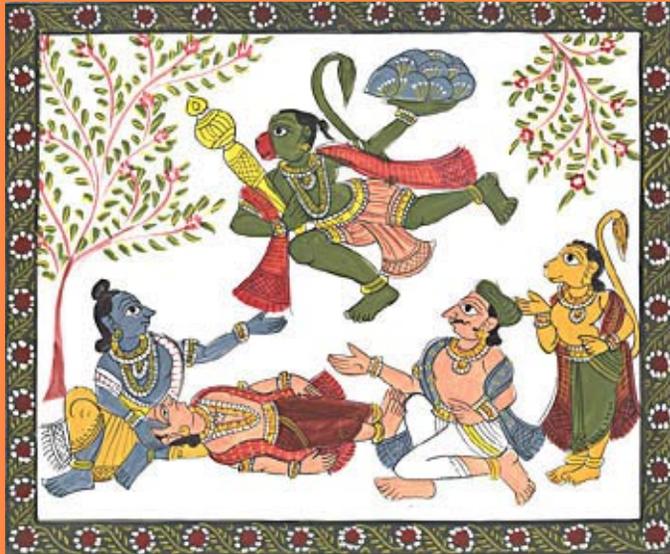
...Hanuman sets Lanka in flames.



The city was soon on fire. Hanuman paused to take a breath and at that moment he was remorse stricken. He dove into the sea and put the fire out of his tail. He thought that in his excitement he had also set fire to Asoka Van, where Sita was captive. He decided to end his life when he overheard a celestial conversation. The conversation revealed that Hanuman had performed a miracle - all of Lanka was in flames except around Sita! It dawned upon Hanuman that it was his mother Sita's prayers which had saved him and herself. Sita was a model of chastity and fire cannot touch her. Hanuman raced back to Sita, who patted him on the head for his valour and urged him to return soon with Rama, Lakshman and the monkey army. Hanuman flew back with his good tidings.



Hanuman brings Sanjeevi Hill.



Indrajit the son of Ravana had disabled the entire army of Rama and Lakshman. Rama and Lakshman were swooning. The vaanars were in agony. Jambavat the old king of the bears was half dead. He called out for Hanuman in a quavering voice. Hanuman heard him and rushed immediately to his side. He importunes him that only he can save Rama, Lakshman, Sita and the army. Hanuman asks how and he tells him to go fetch the medicinal herbs from the Himalayas. Hanuman questions how he would find them. Jambavat replies that he would find them on the Rishabha and Kailasha peaks. He would have to go immediately. Hanuman could not recognise the herbs but he brought the whole of Sanjeevi Hill back. As he approached the wounded gods and vaanars, they started feeling better and they all stood ready to do battle again.



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Dr. Nalini Sahay

Nalini Sahay lives in Delhi.She chose to write these stories as an experiment for ebook publishing. As her Introduction to the series states " it was surprising how the folk artists and the tribal artists were completely at ease with the stories and could illustrate them ". She believes the stories are relevant and plans to continue extracting them from the Puranas.



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◀ **Hanuman** ▶

