

***Om Shreem Hreem Kleem Klowm Gum Ganapathaye Vara
Varatha Sarvajanamay Vasamaanaya Swaha***

Lord Ganesha

Compiled by K.Raman



Lord Ganesha



Lord Ganesha - the Hindu deity in a human form but with the head of an elephant - represents the power of the Supreme Being that removes obstacles and ensures success in human endeavors. For this reason, Hindus worship Ganesha first before beginning any religious, spiritual or worldly activity. In Hindu mythology, Lord Ganesha is the first son of Lord Shiva and the Divine Mother Parvati. Their second son is Lord Subramanya and their daughter is Jyoti. As explained below, the portrayal of Lord Ganesha as the blend of human and animal parts symbolizes the ideals of perfection as conceived by Hindu sages and illustrates some philosophical concepts of profound spiritual significance.

Elephant head, wide mouth, and large ears: the large head of an elephant symbolizes wisdom, understanding, and a discriminating intellect that one must possess to attain perfection in life. The wide mouth represents the natural human desire to enjoy life in the world. The large ears signify that a perfect person is the one who possesses a great capacity to listen to others and assimilate ideas.

The trunk and two tusks with the left tusk broken: there is no known human instrument that has an operating range as wide as that of an elephant's trunk. It can uproot a tree and yet lift a needle off the ground.

Likewise, the human mind must be strong enough to face the ups and downs of the external world and yet delicate enough to explore the subtle realms of the inner world. The two tusks denote the two aspects of the human personality, wisdom and emotion. The right tusk represents wisdom and the left tusk represents emotion. The broken left tusk conveys the idea that one must conquer emotions with wisdom to attain perfection. Elephant eyes: the elephant eyes are said to possess natural deceptiveness that allows them to perceive objects to be bigger than what they really are. Thus the elephant eyes symbolize the idea that even if an individual gets "bigger and bigger" in wealth and wisdom, he should perceive others to be bigger than himself; that is, surrender one's pride and attain humility. The four arms and various objects in the four hands: the four arms indicate that the Lord is omnipresent and omnipotent. The left side of the body symbolizes emotion and the right side symbolizes reason. An axe in the upper left hand and a lotus in the upper right hand signify that in order to attain spiritual perfection, one should cut worldly attachments and conquer emotions. This enables one to live in the world without being affected by earthly temptations, just as a lotus remains in water but is not affected by it. A tray of Laddus (a popular snack) near the Lord denotes that He bestows wealth and prosperity upon His devotees. The lower right hand is shown in a blessing pose, which signifies that Ganesha always blesses His devotees.

A human body with a big belly: the human body possesses a human heart, which is a symbol of kindness and compassion toward all. Ganesha's body is usually portrayed wearing red and yellow clothes. Yellow symbolizes purity, peace and truthfulness. Red symbolizes the activity in the world. These are the qualities of a perfect person who performs all duties in the world, with purity, peace, and truthfulness. The big belly signifies that a perfect individual must have a large capacity to face all pleasant and unpleasant experiences of the world.

A mouse sitting near the feet of Ganesha and gazing at the tray of Laddus: a mouse symbolizes the ego that can nibble all that is good and noble in a person. A mouse sitting near the feet of Ganesha indicates that a perfect person is one who has conquered his (or her) ego. A mouse gazing at the Laddus, but not consuming them, denotes that a purified or controlled ego can live in the world without being affected by the worldly temptations. The mouse is also the vehicle of Ganesha, signifying that one must control ego in order for wisdom to shine forth.

Right foot dangling over the left foot: as stated above, the left side of the body symbolizes emotion and the right side symbolizes reason and knowledge. The right foot dangling over the left foot illustrates that in order to live a successful life one should utilize knowledge and reason to overcome emotions.

Ganesh Legends

Ganesha in World Religions



Ganesha, the global traveler! Besides His more celebrated attributes, He could well be called the Peripatetic One, given His large footprint in other lands and religions. How and why did this happen? Because He is the Lord

of Adaptability who defies quick definition. His multiple and often contradictory qualities make it easy for Him to cross cultural and religious borders, synthesize local sentiments and assume new forms. This traveler has many tales to tell.

Jainism

Ganesha is widely worshipped by Jains, though there is no mention of him in early Jaina religious writings. He first emerges in a 12th century literary work by Hemachandra, a Jain scholar, philosopher and historian who variously names Ganesha as Heramba, Vinayaka and Ganavignesa. Between the two historical Jaina sects – Svetambara and Digambara – it was the more liberal Svetambaras who embraced Ganesha, along with other Hindu deities. Svetambara texts extol Ganesha as a deity whom even other gods propitiate to attain their wishes. Svetambara Jains observe the Hindu practice of commencing all auspicious ceremonies and new enterprises with obeisance to Ganesha.

A 9th century Jain temple at Mathura (Uttar Pradesh) has the earliest known image of Ganesha in this religion, along with Ambika (another name for His mother, Parvati). Several temple images of Vinayaka are also found in the Jainism dominated states of Rajasthan and Gujarat. Travelers to Mumbai can find a Ganesha carving at the beautiful, marble Jain temple in Walkeshwar.

Typically, Ganesha is looked upon as a guardian and not a principal deity in Jainism – hence, His image on doorframes or basements of Jain temples.

Buddhism

Somewhere between the sixth and tenth century, ancient India saw a surge in trade and commercial activity. This period coincided with a rise in Ganesha worship among the merchant community – early inscriptions suggest that the practice of 'Ganesha first' originated with traders. It's also possible that Ganesha took on some of the functions traditionally associated with Kubera, the god of wealth and naturally, became attractive to merchant communities.

Ganesha travelled into neighboring Asian countries along with merchants seeking new markets – this is based on the finding of fifth or sixth century Ganesha images in Myanmar, where Mahayana Buddhism had taken root. In Nepal, Heramba a 16-headed form of Ganesha was popularly worshipped.

Ganesha plays a dual role in Buddhism – a Buddhist god in His own right, as well as a Hindu deity, known as Vinayaka. The Buddhist Vinayaka assumed the form of Nritta Ganapati or Dancing Ganesha, whose popularity in North India spread into Nepal and later, Tibet.

Ganesha, The World Traveler Series – Tibet



Tibetan Buddhism, with its strong Tantric leanings, took a fascinatingly ambivalent view of Ganesha. Robert L. Brown (Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God) says these sharply contrasting versions can best be understood by seeing Ganesha as a Janus-like deity, rather than two different gods. As

Lord of Obstacles, He controls impediments in their entirety. In His negative – read Tantric – aspect, He creates or chooses to condone the existence of problems. The benign Puranic Ganesha, removes obstacles or refrains from creating them. Seventh and eighth century Buddhist texts from China, originally authored by Indians, state that Ganesha started off as an obstacle-creator – vigna-karta – who had to be ritually appeased so He would keep away. Around the sixth century, this willful, dangerous being metamorphosed into a benign vigna-harta or obstacle-remover and entered the Hindu pantheon!

In Tibetan Buddhism however, the Tantric, malevolent Ganesha prevailed over the kindlier version. Tibetan iconography shows Him being trampled underfoot by Mahakala, the Protector of Dharma. He is known as Maha Rakta Ganapati, a fearsome emanation of Avalokiteswara, with a red body, three eyes and twelve hands holding various weapons as well as skull cups filled with human flesh and blood.

Ganesha, The World Traveler Series – Cambodia and Vietnam

Stone and bronze statues found in excavations suggest that Ganesha arrived in Cambodia around the 6th or 7th century, long before the vast, powerful Khmer Empire co-opted Hinduism and Buddhism as its official religions. Temple inscriptions in eastern Cambodia's Champa region suggest that Shiva worship was widely prevalent.

Cambodia's early Ganesha closely resembled Gupta representations – large, fan-shaped ears, no headgear, two arms and only slightly pot-bellied. Strangely, other Indian representations like the Nritta Ganapati, Ganesha with his consorts or parents failed to reach Cambodia during the Khmer era.

Innumerable Ganesha idols have also been unearthed in Vietnam, once part of the Khmer Empire. They can be seen in the Cham Museum of Art, Danang and Saigon Museum. In both Cambodia and Vietnam, Ganesha continues to inspire artisans who produce images in varying forms.



Ganesha, The World Traveler Series – Indonesia

Indonesia's historical ties with India, in particular the island of Java, find mention in the Ramayana. In Java, where Hinduism struck strong roots, Ganesha was represented in a huge variety of forms, an indication of His popularity. A seated, four-armed Ganesha holding a broken tusk, garland and bowl of sweets, thought to be from the 8th century was found in Chandi Banon temple, central Java. Other ancient statues bear similarity to the iconography of the Ellora caves in India.

The Tantric Ganesha found in other Southeast Asian countries has echoes in Java as well. A 13th century Ganesha statue from Bara in east Java represents him as both Creator and Destroyer of Obstacles. Over the years, excavations have thrown up several Ganesha images all over the island. On Borneo Island, 5th century inscriptions suggest that this was the

easternmost limit reached by Ganesha. The 8th century cave Genung Kombeng has Buddhist and Hindu stone carvings of a four-armed Ganesha along with Shiva and Durga.



In Bali, Islamic Indonesia's Hindu enclave, every village has a minimum of three temples and Ganesha is a familiar entity. He presides over knowledge, along with Goddess Saraswati. More prominently, he is a guardian deity of temples – Dvarapala – and is therefore, stationed at their gates. Since his task is to obstruct demons, the Balinese Ganesha is typically stern-faced.

Among the best known Balinese Ganesha temples is the 11th century cave of Goa Gajah – literally Cave of the Elephant – with representations of the Hindu trinity and Ganesha. Skilled Balinese artisans produce Ganesha icons in varied materials and forms. Stone idols from Batubalan are usually in

the classical style. In the Ubud region, elaborately carved Ganeshas are made from a soft, white wood (known locally as “crocodile wood”); a simple, rounded Ganesha is carved from suar, a mahogany-like wood. Artisans paint Ganesha on finely carved cattle bone, imported mammoths’ tusks and egg shells. Bronze statues with a patina of green are sold in Java. Balinese shadow theatre, portraying themes from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, features a Ganesha puppet character made of buffalo skin.

[Ganesha, The World Traveler Series – Japan](#)



Ganesha, the global traveler! Besides His more celebrated attributes, He could well be called the Peripatetic One, given His large footprint in other lands and religions. How and why did this happen? Because He is the Lord of Adaptability who defies quick definition. His multiple and often contradictory qualities make it easy for Him to cross cultural and religious borders, synthesize local sentiments and assume new forms. This traveler has many tales to tell.

Early Buddhists brought Ganesha to Japan. Ganesha worship gained ascendance during the time of Kukai, the 9th century founder-sage of the Shingon school of Japanese Buddhism. Known as Kangiten or Binayakaten, Ganesha was worshipped as a principal deity in Shingon Buddhism;

the sect's rituals and beliefs bear a close resemblance to those of the Hindu Ganapatya cult, who consider Ganesha to be the Supreme Being. Among other Japanese Buddhist sects, Ganesha is a minor deity, varyingly known as Daishokangi-ten or Ganabachi.

In Japanese Buddhism, Kangiten's blessings are sought primarily for material progress, followed by enlightenment. Sacred offerings to this 'God of Happiness' include "bliss-buns" prepared from dried flour, honey and yoghurt besides fresh fruit, radishes and wine. These are distributed to worshippers much like the Hindu practice of giving prasad.

Ganesha assumes 30 distinctive forms in Japanese iconography, often as a dual entity. One erotic form, specific to Shingon Buddhism, features two embracing male and female forms with elephant heads and human bodies. These are rare idols, worshipped with secret rituals inside temples. Typically, they are made of metal as they must be immersed in oil during worship. Gumyo-ji, an 8th century temple in Minami, Yokohama has one such image. Often, Japanese temple doors feature two long-robed, elephant-headed figures in an embrace.

Young Japanese popularly worship Kangiten as a symbol of conjugal bliss. Many entrepreneurs, especially those whose business involves food and drink, worship Ganesha as Shou Ten, a benevolent obstacle-remover and enhancer of wealth.

[What is Ganapati Atharvashirsha?](#)

Visitors to the Ganesha temple at Ranjangaon, Maharashtra – one of the Ashtavinayak shrines – invariably look up at the entrance to the main hall, so that their eyes may rest upon a sacred text carved into the stone. This is the Ganapati Atharvashirsha, often referred to as the Ganapati Upanishad. Among Maharashtrians, the Atharvashirsha holds pride of place as the most widely chanted Sanskrit text devoted to their favored deity.

Origin

Nobody knows for sure when the Atharvashirsha was composed. Scholars believe it could have been sometime between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Some say it was composed by the Sage Atharva, but that is doubtful, since none of the Upanishads bear an author's name. History records that the Atharvashirsha came into prominence during the

early 1900s when Ganesha worship among Pune-based Maharashtra Brahmins became popular.

What does 'Atharvashirsha' mean?

The scholar John A. Grimes (Ganapati: Song of the Self) surmises that Atharvashirsha implies "firmness or singlepointedness of the intellect as directed towards one's realization of the Divine." Studying this text helps the worshipper reach the four goalposts of life as laid out in Hinduism – Dharma (doing the right thing), Artha (material prosperity), Kama (enjoyment of sensual pleasures) and finally, Moksha (liberation of the soul).



What does it say?

The Atharvashirsha is the definitive text on Ganesha. It pays homage to Him as the Supreme Deity, one who subsumes all other divinities. He is the

Holy Trinity who cyclically creates, sustains and destroys the universe. He embodies within Him the five elements, the past, present and future and all celestial bodies.

Importantly, the text contains the bija or 'seed mantra' of Ganesha – Gam – and teaches a devotee how to use the mantra appropriately and worship Ganesha. Further stanzas reverentially describe Ganesha's attributes – His tusk, multiple arms, belly and weaponry. These are for the devotee to meditate upon as they contain the philosophical essence of Ganesha worship.

Studying the Atharvashirsha enables the worshipper to remain free in spirit, unmoved by obstacles and liberated from sin. Meditating upon the text every morning and evening wipes out the consequences of any sinful actions committed in the intervening periods.

The text sounds a cautionary note – it should not be taught to those without faith and devotion. A teacher who does so out of greed is considered a great sinner.

Reciting the Atharvashirsha regularly empowers a devotee tremendously. Different means of worship confer different benefits. Ritual bathing of Ganesha helps one master the art of eloquence. Worship with Durva grass brings wealth. With rice flakes come fame and scholarship. Offering modaks brings the devotee his heart's desire. He who offers all of these, along with ghee, attains everything.

What is Sankashti Chaturthi?

Sankashti Chaturthi is a special day of the month in the Hindu calendar when Ganesha's devotees invoke His blessings to rid themselves of problems and impediments. This sacred time falls on the fourth day after the full moon.

"Sankata" in Sanskrit means difficulty, crisis or obstacle, while "hara" refers to removal or elimination. On this day, devotees fast from morning until moonrise. In the evening, after a ritual bath, Ganesha is worshipped with sacred Durva grass. Devotees recite His prayers – the Ganesha Gayatri, the Ashtothram Shatanamavali (His 108 names) and the Ganesha Atharvashirsha Avartan. The moon is also worshipped with offerings of flowers and sandalwood paste.



On Sankashti Chaturthi, Ganesha temples close down about an hour before moonrise. The idol is bathed with milk and rosewater to the chants of Vedic prayers. Ganesha is offered steamed modaks and His other favored foods.

Performing this puja is believed to liberate the worshipper's soul from the cycle of birth and death.

The Legend of Chintamani – The Mystic Gem

King Abhijeet was a wise and powerful ruler with no heir to his throne. Upon the advice of Sage Vaishyampane, Abhijeet and his queen undertook

a long penance. They were rewarded with a baby boy whom they named Gana.

The child, who grew up to be called Prince Ganaraja, once received an invitation to visit Sage Kapila's renowned ashram. The sage was a generous host for he had in his possession, the mystic wish-fulfilling gem Chintamani. Using this he conjured up a delectable feast for his royal visitor. Ganaraja was astonished and impressed. He was filled with intense desire to obtain the gem for himself. Would the sage give it to him? Kapila predictably refused, whereupon the prince wrested it out of his hands and made off to the palace. The distraught sage prayed to Goddess Durga, who advised him to approach Ganesha for help.

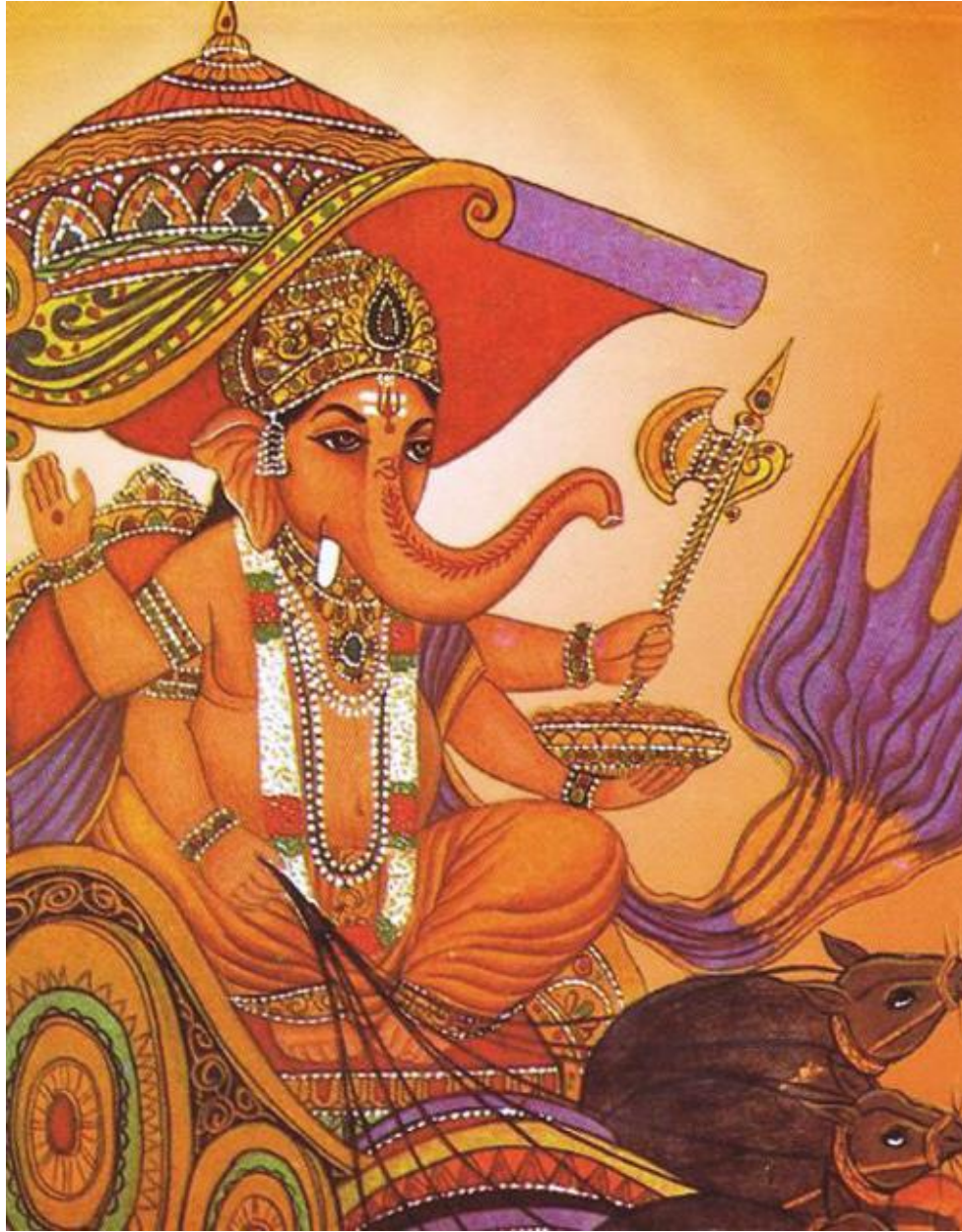
Ganesha battled Ganaraja beneath a Kadamba tree and won the Chintamani back for the sage. By this time however, Kapila had lost all interest in the stone. In gratitude however, he hung it around Ganesha's neck.

Theyoor, near Pune (Maharashtra) where this incident is believed to have taken place is also called Kadamba Nagar. In the temple erected nearby is the idol of Chintamani Vinayak – one of the eight pilgrimage centres for Ganesha's devotees, known as the Ashtavinayak circuit.

Who would not want to own a gem imbued with magical powers to fulfil one's every worldly need and desire? Prince Ganaraja was no exception to this all too common human weakness. But more interestingly, why did Sage Kapila, after seeking Ganesha's help, lose interest in the stone? Watching the Lord do battle with Ganaraja, Kapila realised that having Ganesha on his side was a far greater asset than owning the gem. The legend is a reminder to visiting devotees that the benevolence of Ganesha will always ensure their well-being and prosperity; they need seek nothing beyond His blessings.

The Legend of Ganesha and the Cat

As a child, Ganesha loved playing with his bows and arrows. Spotting a white cat one day, he decided to play hunter and shot arrows at it. The terrified creature ran for cover, but Ganesha thought it was playing a game.



He looked behind a tree – there it was, trembling and round-eyed. “Aha, got you!” said the chubby god and shot at it again. Miaowing with fear, the cat scooted for cover under a log. Ganesha chased it down and pulled it out. He rolled it around in the mud and threw it up in the air like a furry ball! Once more, the cat escaped. Ganesha lost interest and went back home.



He was in for a shock. There sat Parvati, his lovely mother, her face and arms scratched and mud-stained.

"Ma, how did you get hurt?" cried the little fellow.

"I've no idea," said Parvati. "What have you been up to?"

"I was playing with a cat and..um...I was pretty rough with her."

"Now I know why I have these bruises!" said Parvati. Drawing Ganesha close, she explained, "Ganesha, my body is the world and every living creature in it. I was that cat, too! Whatever you do to other beings, you do to me as well!"

Ganesha was stunned and deeply remorseful. "So my every little action matters...wow! I'm so sorry, Ma, I'll never do harm to anything...ever!"

Smiling at her son, Parvati said, "That may not be possible, son. But do be aware of your actions and harm as little as possible."

Nodding, Ganesha ran off to find the little cat and make peace with her.

This ancient myth works at many levels. When told to a young person, it brings home the message of non-violence, for which child can bear to see its mother hurt? It also exemplifies the concept of the sacred feminine. By personifying the earth and all of creation as a benevolent and beautiful goddess, the legend drives home the vital importance of respecting the environment and caring for it.

The Legend of Ganesha's Sacred Grass

Analasura was a ferocious demon whose voice made the earth tremble and whose eyes emitted fire. His thirst for bloodletting spared none – powerful sages and strong men included. The god Indra engaged him in battle several times and retired defeated.

Weary of his rampaging, all the celestials trooped to Lord Shiva for advice. Shiva did have a remedy for them – that they should approach Ganesha, whose huge pot belly alone could contain Analasura.

Ganesha agreed to help and transformed himself into a chubby, little boy. Analasura approached him, his eyes shooting fireballs, reducing the environment around Ganesha into cinders. In the battle that ensued, Ganesha suddenly assumed enormous proportions and gulped down the demon.



This was somewhat akin to our swallowing a plateful of chillies. Ganesha was in agony, unable to lie down or remain still. The panicked gods offered several remedies to cool Him down but nothing worked. Finally, relief came in the form of 88,000 sages, each of whom performed healing rituals with 21 blades of Durva grass.

Ganesha declared that henceforth, anyone worshipping Him with Durva grass would be the recipient of his benevolence.

Durva grass has played an important role in Hindu rituals since ancient times. It is believed to have purifying and healing properties. When plucked, it grows back rapidly. It is thus an enduring symbol of renewal, regeneration and fertility leading to associations with prosperity. For this reason, Durva is linked to a householder god like Ganesha, rather than His hermit father, Shiva.

Durva is derived from two words – duhu, the first word means “that which exists afar” while avam is “that which pulls closer”. Interpreted in the context of Ganesha, the use of Durva during worship draws His great power, which in turn dispels the negativity within our bodies.

The Durva’s three blades symbolize the essence of Shiva, Shakti and Ganesha.

At a more basic level, the ritual exemplifies how easy it is to please Ganesha with the offering of this humble grass.

Puja Rituals in Ganesh Chaturthi



The nicest part of Ganesha's birthday, Ganesh Chaturthi, is that anyone can celebrate it, thanks to its relative lack of mystifying ritualism. Ganesh Chaturthi is a social event, spreading goodwill and bonhomie and marking the start of the Indian festive season in the latter half of the year.

Traditionally, a thorough house-cleaning is carried out the day prior to the festival, in much the same spirit when expecting a very special guest. In some Maharashtrian homes, women fast to invoke the blessings of Parvati, Ganesha's mother (again, this isn't mandatory).

The festival officially takes off on the evening of Day One, when the services of priests are requisitioned for installing the idol, either in homes or in public mandals. While beautifully painted idols are sold all over, you can go creative and make your own Ganesha out of clay, much like his mother, Parvati did! Yellow Calendula flower garlands are the prescribed form of decoration for Ganesha; in their absence, he is adorned with the more easily available marigolds. A bunch of holy durva grass is also a must. Ganesha's favourite snack, a plate of modaks, is placed before him. With the entire family assembled, the priest lights the oil lamp and incense sticks and chants prayers and incantations that will charge the idol with prana, the universal life-force. During the festival, it is believed that the home and those who visit it will benefit from the power of this force. The ceremony ends with arti and a round of modaks for everyone.

For the next nine days, Vinayaka is worshipped morning and evening with simple prayers and readings from sacred texts. It's open house season, with friends and relatives shuttling between homes or alternatively, visiting the huge public celebrations at temples and mandals. In many places, cultural activities are organized, when devotees showcase their talents in traditional music and dance, skits, debates and food fairs. The large, public celebration committees also organize social service activities alongside, such as free medical check-ups and blood donation camps...

The 32 forms of Ganesha



Ganesha is best loved as a household God, one who smoothens the many large and small bumps of daily life, helps us overcome weaknesses like pride, jealousy and greed and bestows abundant material prosperity. But there's also the other aspect of Ganesha – the immense, elemental force that orders the universe. How does one understand Ganesha as a whole? Impossible as it is to contain Him, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below is the list of all 32 forms of Ganesha. In the future weeks we will post description of each of these forms.

Bala Ganapati

Taruna Ganapati

Bhakti Ganapati

Shakti Ganapati

Vira Ganapati

Siddhi Ganapati

Dvija Ganapati

Ucchhishta Ganapati

Kshipra Ganapati

Vighna Ganapati

Heramba Ganapati

Vijaya Ganapati

Maha Ganapati

Lakshmi Ganapati

Nritya Ganapati

Urdhva Ganapati

Varada Ganapati

Ekakshara Ganapati

Tryakshara Ganapati

Haridra Ganapati

Ekadanta Ganapati

Kshipra Prasada Ganapati

Uddanda Ganapati

Srishti Ganapati

Rinamochana Ganapati

Dhundhi Ganapati

Dvimukha Ganapati

Trimukha Ganapati

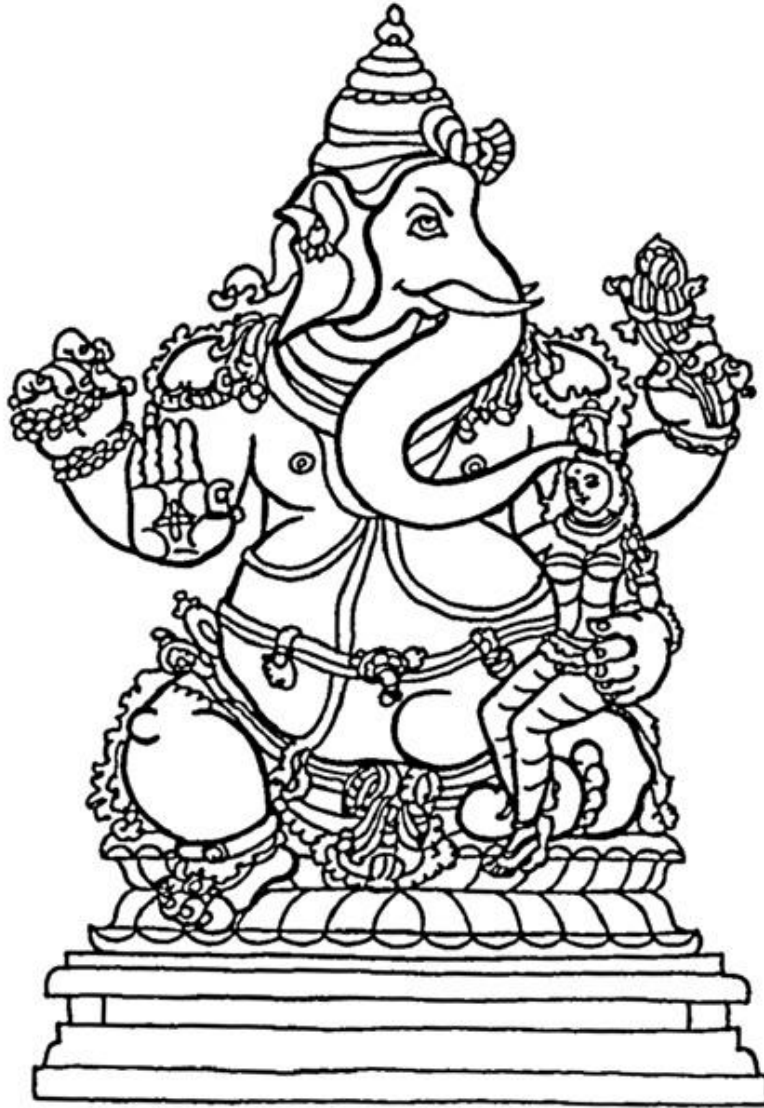
Yoga Ganapati

Sinha Ganapati

Sankatahara Ganapati

Durga Ganapati

1-5 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Shakti Ganapati

Impossible as it is to contain Ganesha, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below are the first five forms.

Bala Ganapati

As a chubby child, Bala Ganapati is golden-hued. He is depicted holding the fruits of the earth – sugarcane, jackfruit, banana and mango – while his trunk is curled around his favored sweet, the modak.

Taruna Ganapati

He bears a goad and noose. Green paddy, a sugarcane stalk, rose apple and wood apple in his many hands symbolize fertility. His body glows red with the effulgence of youth.

Bhakti Ganapati

An enduring symbol of faith. Flower bedecked, bearing his devotees' offerings of a coconut, a mango and a small pot of sweet milk pudding, Bhakti Ganapati is a pleasing sight for his devotees.

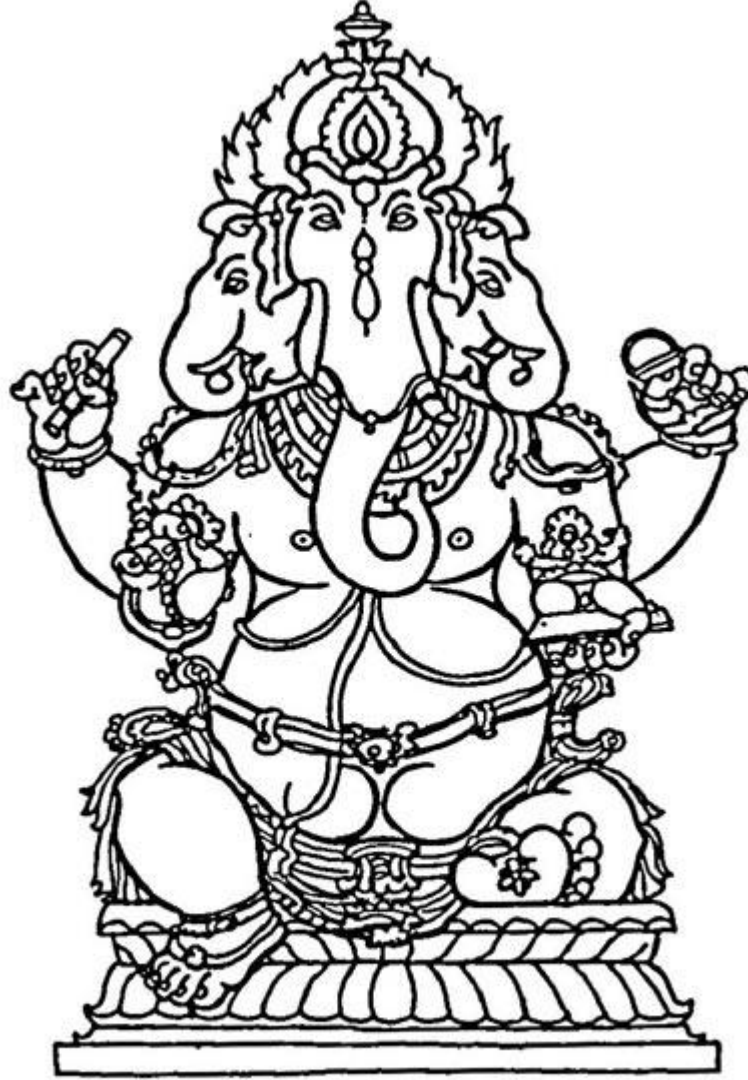
Shakti Ganapati

"Shakti" or creative power assumes a female form seated on Ganesha's knee. This vermilion hued Lord protects the householder. His three hands each hold a noose, goad and a garland. The fourth, in abhaya mudra offers reassurance of his protection.

Vira Ganapati

As an awe-inspiring warrior, this 16-armed Ganapati stands tall and strong with a veritable armory of weapons. With his goad, bow and arrow, discus, shield, spear, sword, axe, trident, mace and more, Vira Ganapati vanquishes both ignorance and evil.

6-10 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Dvija Ganapati

Impossible as it is to contain Him, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below are the next five forms of Ganesha:

Siddhi Ganapati

Siddhi Ganapati assumes the relaxed pose of one who is the master of the intellect. Resplendent in golden-yellow, he bears in his hands, a posy of flowers, a mango, a stalk of sugarcane and the familiar axe. His trunk curves around a sweet sesame ball, another favorite food.

Dvija Ganapati

“Dvija” is twice-born – remember the tale of Shiva beheading Ganesha and resurrecting him with an elephant’s head? In this form, he holds a palm-leaf inscription, a staff, meditation beads, water pot, noose and goad.

Ucchhishta Ganapati

As the blue-complexioned Ucchista Ganapati, he presides over culture. The “shakti” of creativity perches on his knee. Ganesha’s hands hold the veena (a musical instrument), a blue lotus, pomegranate, meditation beads and a stalk of paddy.

Kshipra Ganapati

He is quick to reward his devotees with boons. This gracious, red-bodied Ganapati holds a twig of the kalpvriksh or wish-fulfilling tree. One tusk is broken. His trunk encircles a small bowl of jewels, symbol of the prosperity he can bestow upon followers.

Vighna Ganapati

As the one who effortlessly overcomes obstacles, Vighna Ganapati’s handsome figure is golden-colored and adorned with jewels. His weaponry to fight impediments is the noose, goad, axe, discus and a sharp tusk. Food and love are never far away from him – his other arms bear a flower-tipped arrow, sugarcane and a modak!

11-15 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Dvija Ganapati

Impossible as it is to contain Him, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below are the next five forms of Ganesha:

Heramba Ganapati

The magnificent Protector of the Helpless is white-bodied, five-faced and seated on a lion. Two of his hands gesture abhaya (protection) and varada (blessings), while his other arms bear food and weapons.

Vijaya Ganapati

As the Victorious One who vanquishes all dark forces, this red-hued Ganesha is seated atop his divine vehicle, Mooshika, the mouse. His four arms bear a broken tusk, noose, goad and a ripe mango.

Maha Ganapati

Seated majestically with one of his shaktis on his knee, Maha Ganapati ("Great One") is awe-inspiring in red. Eight arms fan out holding his broken tusk, blue lily, lotus, a pomegranate, a stalk of sugarcane, sprig of paddy and his familiar weapons. Secure in his trunk is a pot of jewels. For those who worship Maha Ganapati, intellectual powers, prosperity and protection from evil are guaranteed.

Lakshmi Ganapati

Riddhi and Siddhi – achievement and wisdom – are Ganesha's companions, here depicted as two maidens seated on the knees of this pure, white form of the Lord. Worshipping Lakshmi Ganapati brings success in every field. One right hand is held in varada mudra, bestowing blessings.

Nritya Ganapati

A beautiful, vibrant form! Ganesha the Dancer glows golden. On his fingers are rings; his four arms bear the tusk, noose, goad and modak. He dances under the kalpvriksh, the epitome of exuberance!

16-20 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Ekakshara Ganapati

Impossible as it is to contain Him, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below are the next five forms of Ganesha:

Urdhva Ganapati

Lord of lords, the Resurgent One. This golden colored form of Urdhva Ganapati sits upon a lotus. His six arms bear a paddy stalk, a lotus, a blue lily, sugarcane bow and his broken tusk.

Varada Ganapati

As the Bestower of Boons, Varada Ganapati bears some of his father Shiva's attributes – the 'third eye' of perception in the middle of his brow and the crescent moon upon his brow. His trunk secures a bowl of gems; his other hands hold the noose, goad and a pot of honey. Shakti sits upon his knee.

Ekakshara Ganapati

"Gam", the single syllable ("ekakshara") that is part of the Ganesha mantra Aum Gam Ganapataye Namah, invokes the blessings of the Lord. Ekakshara Ganapati is red-complexioned and adorned with red garments. Seated on Mooshika the mouse, Ganapati's one hand gestures blessings, while the other three hold the goad, noose and a pomegranate. The crescent moon and third eye are present too, in this form.

Tryakshara Ganapati

He derives this name from the word A-U-M in which three sounds are mingled. This golden-skinned Ganapati has large, floppy ears with fly whisks tucked into them! The noose, goad, tusk and mango in his hands and a modak in his trunk complete the picture.

Haridra Ganapati

Gold-colored and clad in yellow, Haridra Ganapati is seated on a throne, the picture of poise. His tusk holds his favorite modak, his hands wield the noose and goad.

21-25 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Uddanda Ganapati

Impossible as it is to contain Him, ancient Sanskrit texts list thirty-two forms of the Lord that give us a glimpse of His manifold attributes. Below are the next five forms of Ganesha:

Ekadanta Ganapati

The Single-Tusked One (Eka=One Danta=Tusk) is blue in color. His axe cuts through ignorance. Another hand holds prayer beads, while a third grasps his broken tusk. For Ekadanta, a sweet laddoo is a delightful snack.

Kshipra Prasada Ganapati

“Kshipra” means the quality of quickness. Ask of him what you will with devotion and faith – this Ganapati, seated on a throne of kusha-grass, will reward you in no time at all. His other attributes: the goad, tusk, noose, pomegranate, lotus and the kalpvriksh.

Uddanda Ganapati

This ten-armed form of the Lord is the one who enforces Dharma, the moral law of the Universe. For this task, he bears ten attributes: the blue lily, sugar cane stalk, lotus, mace, noose, paddy, a broken tusk and a garland.

Srishti Ganapati

The red-hued Lord who presides over manifest creation sits astride Mooshika, his divine mouse vehicle. The noose, goad and a ripe mango are his attributes. His broken tusk represents his willingness to sacrifice.

Rinamochana Ganapati

Marble skinned and clad in red silk, this Ganapati offers salvation from guilt and attachment. His trunk holds another favored fruit, the wood apple, while his hands bear the noose, goad and broken tusk.

26-32 of 32 Forms of Ganesha



Voṭa Ganapati

Dhundhi Ganapati

The Ganapati whom all devotees seek out (dhundh=search) He holds prayer beads, his broken tusk and an axe. The pot of gems nestled in his trunk symbolizes the spiritual enlightenment that his faithful devotees will receive.

Dvimukha Ganapati

“Dvi” is “two” and “mukha” is “face”. Ganapati’s two faces can see in all directions. His form is a luminous blue-green. A jeweled crown graces his head. His hands hold the goad, noose, a pot of gems and his tusk.

Trimukha Ganapati

This three-headed, red-complexioned Ganapati is seated on a golden lotus. One hand turns prayer beads; the others each clasp a goad, noose and a pot of nectar. Two hands are held in abhaya mudra and varada mudra.

Yoga Ganapati

This blue clad form of the Lord has the complexion of the rising sun. Seated with his knees strapped, he is completely immersed in meditation; his hands hold a stalk of sugar cane, a staff, prayer beads and a noose.

Sinha Ganapati

This dazzling white form of the Lord, seated on a lion, symbolizes his great strength and courage. In his hands, he displays another lion, a twig from the kalpvriksh, the veena, a lotus flower, a floral bouquet and a pot of gems.

Sankatahara Ganapati

The Lord who dispels sorrow and difficulty is appropriately sun-colored, with contrasting blue vestments. He sits on a red lotus with a noose and goad. Another hand bestows boons, while his trunk secures a bowl of sweet rice pudding.

Durga Ganapati

In this form, Ganapati takes on the attributes of Mother Durga, the invincible goddess. Magnificently golden in color, he wears red garments. His weaponry includes a bow and arrow, goad and noose. Also present are his prayer beads, a rose apple and his broken tusk.

Eight Avatars of Ganesha



Avatar in Sanskrit means “descent”; in Hindu mythology, a deity descends from heaven to earth for a specific purpose. Sacred texts like the Ganesha Purana and Mudgala Purana state that Ganesha assumed eight avatars, each manifesting in a different epoch and descriptive of a single attribute. All the avatars had one purpose – to slay a demon.

**Vakratunda (Lord of the Twisted Trunk)
Ekadanta (Lord of the Single Tusk)
Mahodara (Great-Bellied One)
Gajanana (Elephant-faced One)**

Lambhodara (Long-Bellied)
Vikata (Misshaped One)
Vighnaraja (King of the World)
Dhoomravarna (Smoke-Colored)

1/8: Avatars of Ganesha

Vakratunda (Lord of the Twisted Trunk)



As Vakratunda, Ganesha embodies the formless spirit of the Universe or Brahman. In this avatar, He defeated the demon, Matsaryasura (Envy), who came into being when Indra, king of the Gods, once lapsed into absent-mindedness. Performing austere penances to Shiva won Matsaryasura the boon of fearlessness. He soon brought all the gods, including mighty Shiva, to their knees. Dattatreya, the unified form of the Holy Trinity, advised them to invoke Vakratunda and divulged to them, the

powerful seed mantra 'Gam'. Their penance bore fruit – Vakratunda appeared seated on a lion and defeated Matsaryasura.

In the long run, there is nothing that envy cannot overcome; it can only be defeated by the purely abstract form of the divine, here symbolized by Ganesha's trunk.

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2/8 Avatars of Ganesha



Ekadanta (Lord of the Single Tusk)

Madasura, demon of Intoxication, was the creation of Sage Chyavana. Shukracharya, guru to the Asuras, imparted to him the Shakti mantra of 'Hrim'. Madasura meditated upon this mantra for centuries, until Shakti appeared and granted him the boon of fulfilling all his desires. Madasura ran amok and subjugated the three worlds. All virtue and goodness disappeared. The gods were then advised by Sanatkumara, Lord of Humanity, to invoke Ekadanta.

Seeing Ekadanta's blue-skinned, terrifying form, seated upon a mouse, Madasura surrendered to the Lord. Ekadanta spared him but commanded that he never appear in places where the Lord is worshipped with true devotion. Madasura however, was left free to enjoy the fruits of any activity imbued with demonic qualities.

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3/8 Avatars of Ganesha

Mahodara (Great-Bellied One)

The legend of Mohasur's creation is an interesting one, evocative of the demon's defining characteristic – delusion. When Shiva was once so lost in meditation that he did not emerge from his trance to help the gods, Parvati assumed the form of an alluring tribal girl and wandered close by, creating disturbance. Shiva opened his eyes and gazed at her, momentarily confused. From that 'confusion' emanated Mohasura, who was promptly whisked away by Shukracharya. The guru initiated Mohasura into the secret of propitiating the sun god. Mohasura soon received the boon of invincibility from Surya and wreaked havoc in the universe. Surya then advised the gods to seek Ganapati's help. When Mahodara manifested, Shukracharya told Mohasur to surrender or face death. Accordingly, the demon pleaded for mercy. Mahodara spared his life and banished him forever to the underworld.



Mahodara also destroyed two other demons – Durbuddhi (Negative Thought) and Jnanaari (Ignorance). In this form, He embodies the wisdom of the Universal Spirit.

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4/8 Avatars of Ganesha

Gajanana.



IN HIS FOURTH INCARNATION, GANESHA ASSUMED THE FORM OF "GAJANANA", WITH THE MOUSE AS HIS VEHICLE. Gajanana made the demon Lobhasur or Lobha (son of Kuber) submit and surrender before him, before putting him to death. Gajanana means "the Lord with an elephant face", and Lobha was the demon of greed.

5/8 Avatars of Ganesha

Lambodara



THE LORD WITH THE PROTUBERANT BELLY, WHO MASTERED KRODHA, THE DEMON OF ANGER. Ganesha's ever-present obesity is emphasized in this particular manifestation. For the Ganapatiya devotees, who consider Ganesha as the Supreme God and the Master of the Universe, the sweet given as offerings are seen like seeds of innumerable worlds inhabited by innumerable living creatures, and the god's belly is large enough to contain within all these worlds and creatures.

6/8 Avatars of Ganesha

Vikata



VIKATA ("THE MISSHAPEN"), WHO SUBDUED KAMA (KAMASUR), THE DEMON OF DESIRE. Interestingly, Ganesha traded in his Mouse Vehicle to ride a peacock in this manifestation.

7/8 Avatars of Ganesha

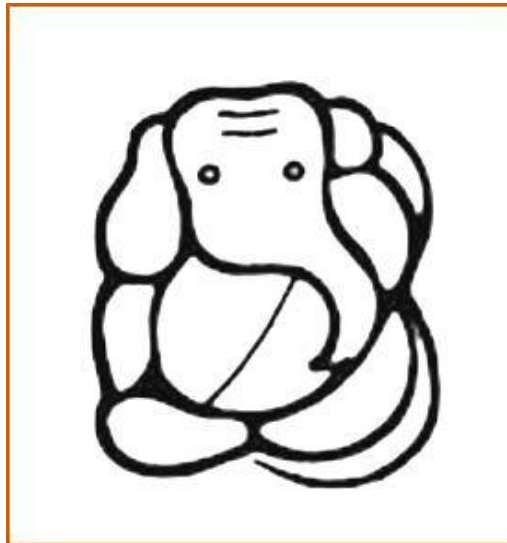
Vighnaraja



VIGHNARAJA, THE 7th INCARNATION OF GANESHA, HAD AN EVEN MORE UNUSUAL MODE OF CONVEYANCE -- a Sheshnaag or Shasha. In this lifetime Ganesha managed to subdue the demon Mamasur (also known as Mamtasur or Mama), the demon of the ego.

The Hindustan Times has this story to tell of Vighnaraja: "This is His (Ganesha's) most popular incarnation, known as The Remover of Obstacles. Riding his vehicle called Sheshnag, a serpent, he strode into battle with Mamtasur, and overcame him."

8/8 Avatars of Ganesha
Dhoomravarna



IN HIS FINAL INCARNATION, GANESHA RETURNED TO HAVING A MOUSE AS HIS VEHICLE. His life mission this time around was to defeat the demon Ahamkarasur, the demon of self-infatuation.

It is worth noting that (as all India-philes must know!) the word "Aham" means the human ego. Aham is the demonic force which grips the human mind like a vice, with cruelty and deception, and never lets go until the very bitter end. Like a parasitic worm Aham is so entrenched in the psyche, the human host eventually thinks that this is all that s/he can identify with. This demon has also been called Ahamkarasur, or Abhimanasur, both words again pointing to the inextricable control of the ego on the human. Ganesha can smash the bonds of your ego, if you call on Him. So call on Him. Go ahead and do it!

Ganapathi Yanthram



Video links:

Maha Ganapathi Moola Mantra

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEte1WfP5yI>

Maha Ganapathi Moola Mantra Homam during Ganesh Chaturthi

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrRfRWyhwe4>