



## Newsletter Archives

[www.dollsofindia.com](http://www.dollsofindia.com)



### Upadevatas or Minor Deities of the Hindu Pantheon - Part 2

Copyright © 2010, Dollsofindia

Continuing with last month's [article](#) on the "lesser" Gods of Hinduism, we follow with the next set of these deities. As explained earlier, there are supposedly about three hundred and thirty crore Gods in Hinduism, and we will be discussing only a few amongst all these deities.

## Yama - the God of Death

Yama, in Hindu mythology, is the lord of death. First recorded in the Vedas, Yama was considered to have been the first mortal who died and discovered the way to reach the celestial abodes. Because he was the pioneer, he became the ruler of the departed. According to some Hindu chronicles, however, Yama has been regarded as the god of death from time immemorial. The term, "Yama", could be interpreted to mean "twin", and in some myths he is paired with a twin sister Yami or Yamuna. Interestingly, this is traditionally the first human pair in the Vedas.

Yama is also known as Dharma or the Dharmaraja, the Lord of Justice, as a mark of respect to his unswerving dedication to maintaining order and harmony in the Universe.

Yama is assisted by Chitragupta, who is given the task of keeping records of all actions of human beings during their on the earth. Upon their death, this record of Karma decides whether or not to have them reincarnated as a superior or inferior organism.

Yama could be likened to the Greek deity, Hades or Pluto, the Lord of the Netherworld.

## Characteristics of Yama Devata

Yama is a Lokapaala or caretaker of the world and an Aditya as well. He is the son of Surya, the Sun God. He is also one among the Digpaalas or the Guardians of the Directions and represents the south. It is believed that Yama is one of the wisest of the devas. In the Katha Upanishad, Yama is portrayed as a wise teacher. He is the father of Yudhisthira (also known as Dharmaraja), the oldest of the 5 Pandava brothers and is believed to have incarnated as Vidura, the wise minister, by some accounts in the Mahabharata epic. Yama is also referred to as Kaala or Time.

## Yama in the Rigveda

The Rigveda mentions Yama as the son of Vivasvat and of Saranyu. Only three hymns of the Rigveda address Yama. In the Rigveda, Yama's name is mentioned almost exclusively in the first and more often in the tenth book.

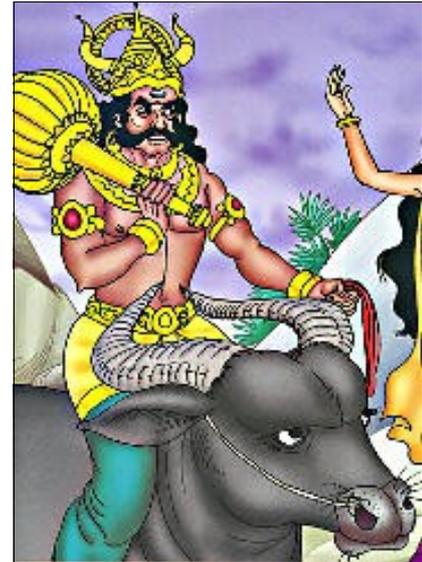
Agni, the God of Fire, who is also the conductor of the dead, has close relations with Yama. Agni is said to be the friend of Yama. Agni is also supposedly Yama's priest, serving as the burner of the dead.

## Physical characteristics

Certain Sanskrit sources state that Yama is dark in color, resembling rain-clouds, with two arms, fire-colored eyes and sharp side-tusks. He is often shown draped in red clothing, and seated either on a lion throne or a buffalo. The Vishnudharmottara, on the other hand, depicts Yama with four arms, wearing golden yellow garments. He holds a pasha (noose of rope) in one hand. Yama as subordinate to Shiva and Vishnu.

Though he is one of the most powerful deities of the Hindu pantheon, Yama is still subordinate to Shiva and Vishnu, as they are part of the Divine Trinity. The story of Markandeya aptly describes this aspect.

Markandeya is an ancient sage, born in the clan of sage Bhrigu. Markandeya, whose name features in many Puranas, was a devotee of both Shiva and Vishnu. One legend relates the story of how Shiva protected Markandeya from Yama.



[Buy this Book](#)

**LORD YAMA  
IN THE BOOK  
"STORIES FROM INDIAN MYTHOLOGY"**

## Markandeya's story

Sage Mrikandu and his wife, Marudmati, performed a penance to Shiva to beget a son. Shiva appeared before them and gave them the choice of either a gifted son, but with a short life on earth or a child of low intelligence but with a long life. Mrikandu Rishi chose the former, and Markandeya was born. He was an exemplary son, ordained to die at the age of 16.

Markandeya was a great devotee of Shiva and on the day of his supposed death, he continued unruffled with his worship of Shiva in the form of the Shivalinga. Yama's messengers tried to claim him, but were unable to do so.

Perplexed, Yama himself came to take Markandeya's life away. He wound his noose around the young boy's neck. The noose landed around the Shivalingam by error. Out of it sprang Lord Shiva, in all his fury, attacking Yama for his aggression. Shiva defeated Yama to the point of death and then revived him, under the condition that his bhakta, Markandeya, would live forever. Shiva, hence, is also referred to as Kaalakalaya, meaning 'the one who brought death, to death himself'.

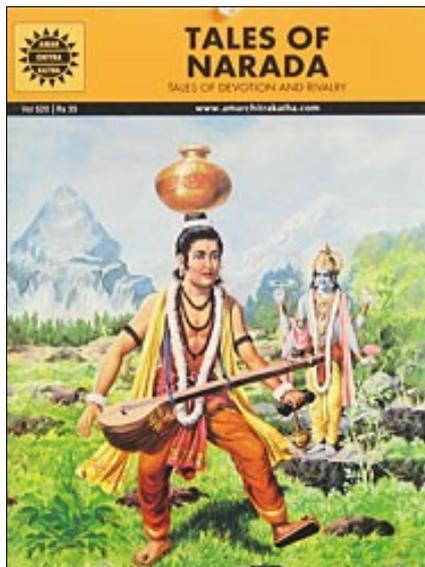
## A tale from the Bhagavata Purana

A popular tale from the Bhagavata Purana shows how Yama was also under the control of Vishnu. There was a time when the entire earth was about to be engulfed by water. Markandeya prayed to Lord Vishnu. The Lord appeared in the form of a child floating on a leaf, and declared to the sage that he was Time and Death. He requested Markandeya to enter into his mouth and save himself from the surging water. Inside the gigantic stomach, Markandeya discovered all the worlds, the seven regions, the seven oceans and all living beings.

Not knowing what to do, Markandeya prayed to Vishnu. He immediately came out of the child's mouth and Vishnu now appeared before him and blessed him. The legend goes on to state that the sage spent a thousand years with Vishnu and also composed the Bala Mukundashtakam on the Lord.

The concept of Yama exists in many other cultures of the world too. Buddhists also consider Yama as one of the major Gods. Yama is also a fundamental part of Iranian, Javanese, Chinese and Japanese mythology, though he has different functions to perform in different religions of the world.

## Narada - the Wandering Mendicant



[Buy this Book](#)

**TALES OF NARADA**

Narada or Narada Muni, as he is also called, is a divine sage in Vaishnavism, who features as a central character in many Puranas and the Ramayana as well. Narada is depicted as a wandering mendicant, who has the unique ability to easily visit distant worlds or planets. He carries his Veena (musical instrument) known as the Mahati. This he uses as accompaniment when he sings prayers and mantras in the name of his Lord, Sri Maha Vishnu.

The Vedas describe Narada as a saintly traveler who is so devoted to his Lord, that he sometimes expands so much bodily, that he ends up breaking the sacred thread on his body. Such is his bhakti that it fills and suffuses him entirely.

The word, "Naara" means "knowledge" and "da" means "giver". So the name, Narada, aptly signifies the sage's function as the one who spreads knowledge among people. The Vaishnavites tradition hold him in great reverence for his chanting the names Hari and Narayana, as also his propagating bhakti yoga as an easy way to attain God's grace. Sage Narada has himself stated this in the Narada Bhakti Sutra.

### Birth of Narada

Narada is considered the Manasaputra of Brahma, as he is supposed to have taken birth from the mind of The Creator. He is also the first living being as described in the Puranic universe. He was also the first to learn about the Natya Yoga or dance. Narada is commonly referred to as the Triloka sanchaari, the one who has easy access to all the three lokas, namely, Swarga (Heaven), Mrityuloka (earth) and Patalaloka (Netherworld).

He is also known as Kalahapriya, as he playfully creates petty quarrels amongst Gods, Goddesses and people. But in whatever Narada does, he only thinks of the ultimate welfare and well-being of the people. Hence, the final result of his actions is in the best interest for everyone concerned.

The Puranas list Narada as one of the twelve Mahajanas, or great devotees of Vishnu. As he was a gandharva in his previous birth, he also falls into the category of a devarishi.

### Narada attains enlightenment

The Bhagavata Purana beautifully narrates the story of Narada's spiritual enlightenment. Narada was a gandharva (divine being) in his previous birth. He had been cursed to be born on earth, due to a sin he committed. Accordingly, he took birth as the son of a maid-servant to some particularly saintly Brahmin priests. The priests, being pleased with his mother's devoted service, blessed Narada and asked him to partake of the Prasad that had been offered to Vishnu during prayer.

Narada moved with them more often and often heard them discussing many spiritual topics. After the death of his mother, he decided to go in search of enlightenment.

Reaching a tranquil forest location, he drank from a nearby stream and then sat under a tree in meditation, concentrating on the Paramatma form of Vishnu within his heart. Narada suddenly experienced a vision of Vishnu appearing before him. Vishnu then disappeared as suddenly, leaving the boy both thrilled and disappointed.

Narada then focused his entire life on Vishnu's devotion, constantly meditating upon and

worshipping to Vishnu. After his mortal death, Vishnu blessed him with the spiritual form of Narada, as he was known later. Several Hindu scriptures consider Narada as a saktyavesa-avatara or partial-manifestation of God.

## **Stories of Narada Muni**

There are many, many stories and legends that revolve around Sage Narada. We bring you two popular stories.

### **Threading elephants through the eye of a needle**

One day Narada came upon a mystic yogi who had been undergoing severe austerities and penance. Upon seeing Narada, the yogi, sensing that he was a spiritual person, and asked Narada who he was. Narada introduced himself and the Yogi paid his respects. He then asked Narada if he would ask the Lord when the Yogi's cycle of birth and death would stop and he would get liberated. Narada agreed and walked away.

The sage then came upon a humble cobbler who lived under a tree. As soon as the cobbler saw Narada Muni, he stood up to pay his respects and requested Narada to ask Maha Vishnu the same thing the Yogi had asked him. Narada agreed to that too and left.

Narada Muni told Vishnu what he had experienced. The Supreme Lord said that the yogi would be liberated only after one hundred lifetimes, while this would be the cobbler's last, as he was a pure devotee. Vishnu also told Narada to tell them that he was threading elephants through the eye of a needle when Narada went to meet him.

When the Yogi learnt he had a hundred more lifetimes before liberation, he was very angry and refused to believe that Narada had actually met the Lord. Then he asked the Sage what Vishnu was doing at that point of time. The Yogi had a good laugh when Narada told him that he was threading elephants through the eye of a needle. Then the Yogi walked away snorting scornfully at Narada.

When Narada met the cobbler met him and gave him his message, and also told him that Vishnu was threading elephants through the eye of a needle, the latter started shedding tears of joy and danced in sheer bhakti. Narada was surprised the cobbler believed the story. On asking him, the cobbler said, "There are countless thousands of these little fruits that fall off this banyan tree. And in each of these fruits you will find there are hundreds and hundreds of little seeds. In each of these little seeds the Supreme Lord has placed a giant banyan tree. For the Supreme Lord, nothing is inconceivable. He is truly wonderful." So saying, the cobbler, who was the true devotee of the Lord, went dancing and singing away.

### **Narada falls into Maya's trap**

Sage Narada, a confirmed bachelor, once went to meet Sri Krishna. Both of them talked for a long time, after which they went for a walk. After walking a great distance, Krishna requested Narada to bring him some water from a nearby village. Glad to be of service to Krishna, proceeded to the first house in the village to procure water for his Lord.

A young, beautiful girl opened the door and Narada was stupefied by her. Forgetting all about Krishna and the reason he came here, he enquired as to who the girl was and who her father was. Introducing himself, he also expressed a desire to marry her. Her father was overjoyed and immediately agreed to the proposal.

The wedding took place and Narada had fathered many children in 12 years of marriage. Narada was very happy and peaceful throughout his married life.

One day, though, heavy rains lashed the village where he lived. Narada decided to leave the village like all the others residing there. Taking some necessary items, he took his family and waded through the waters. He could not see where he was going and tripped on the way. Losing all his belongings, he desperately held onto his family. But his children too slipped away into a vicious whirlpool. Even his wife was not spared and she too was

pulled into the waters.

A flash of lightning almost blinded Narada. When it cleared up, though, Narada was astonished to see that he was standing near Krishna, where he had left him to go in search of water. There was no wife, no family, no rain, nothing at all.

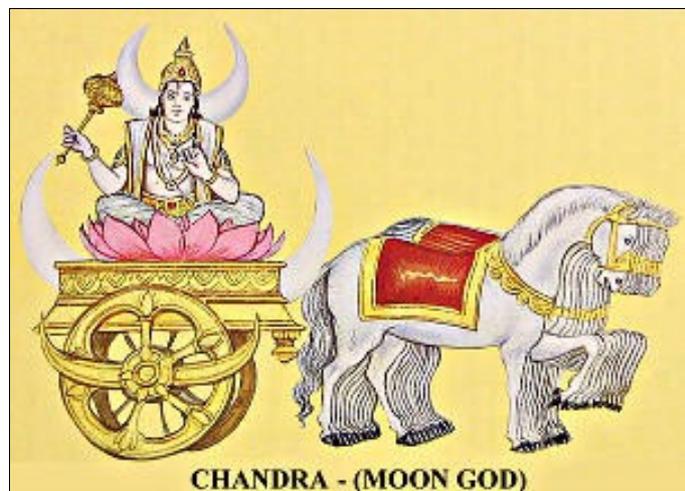
Narada immediately understood that it was all the work of Maya or illusion and that the only real, permanent thing was the Lotus Feet of the Lord. He immediately fell at Krishna's feet and shed bitter tears, repenting his folly. He also requested to be free of Maya forever. Krishna granted Narada the boon and fondly, walked back with him to his palace.

---

## Soma - the Moon God

Soma was a ritual drink of importance among the early Indo-Iranians, and then, the later Vedic and greater Persian cultures too. This gets frequent mention in the Rigveda as well, whose Soma Mandala contains many hymns praising its energizing qualities.

This intoxicating potion is gotten by extracting juice from the stalks of a certain plant, called Soma. In both Vedic and Zoroastrian tradition, the drink is identified with the plant, and also personified as a divinity, the three forming a religious or mythological unity.



**SOMA - THE MOON GOD  
IN THE BOOK  
"NAVAGRAHA"**

There has been much speculation about the exact identity of the original plant. There is still no consensus on the subject, although most experts now seem to favour a species of Ephedra.

## Soma as the Moon God

Soma is depicted as a deva in the Vedas. Then, the god, the drink and the plant were presumably used interchangeably - the line of differentiation was ambiguous. There are two holy drinks. One is Soma for the immortal soul and the other, the Amrita for the immortal body. Amrita could be likened to the Greek Ambrosia. Hindu texts often portray Indra and Agni consuming Soma in rather large quantities!

Interestingly, the Ninth Mandala of the Rigveda, which consists of hymns addressed to Soma Pavamma, is known as the Soma Mandala. The drink Soma was kept and distributed by the Gandharvas. In the Vedic ritual Agnistoma (or Somoyaga), Soma is to be presented as the main offerings to the presiding deity.

## Physical characteristics of Lord Soma

In Hinduism, the god Soma, also referred to as Chandra or the Moon God, was depicted as a bull or bird, and sometimes even as an embryo, but rarely as an adult human. This deity evolved into a lunar deity. Hence, the full moon is considered the right time to collect the divine drink. The moon is also the cup from which the gods drink Soma. This

identifies Soma even more with the Moon God, Chandra.

A waxing moon meant Soma was recreating himself, ready to be drunk again. Monday is referred to as Somavaram in Sanskrit and Hindi and most other Indian languages.

---

## Vishwakarma - the Divine Architect



[Buy this Statue](#)

**VISHWAKARMA**

Vishwakarma, meaning, "the creator of the Universe", is the presiding deity of all craftsmen and architects in Hindu culture. He is the "Carpenter of the Gods", the architect who designed the architecture of the entire Universe. He is called 'Devashilpi' or 'The Architect of Gods'. Vishwakarma is also the designer of all the flying chariots of the gods, and all their weapons and divine attributes. He is said to have revealed the Sthapatyaveda or fourth Upa-veda, and presides over the sixty-four mechanical arts.

Vishwakarma, the son of Prabhas, the eighth hermit of the legendary Astam Basu, is also credited with creating the missiles used in the mythological era, including Indra's Vajra from the bones of sage Dadhichi.

### Vishwakarma in the Vedas

The Yajurveda describes Vishwakarma as a Virad purusha, from whose navel the divine smith Tvastar originated. It is commonly believed that Vishwakarma created 5 Brahmas from each of his 5 faces, namely, Sanaga Brahma Rishi, Sanaathana Brahma Rishi, Abhuvanasa Brahma Rishi,

Prathnasa Brahma Rishi and Suparnasa Brahma Rishi.

Vishwakarma is hence identified with Prajapati, or the Lord of Creation. He is often portrayed as the universal Father and Generator, who has on every side eyes, faces, arms, and feet.

The Rig Veda venerated Vishwakarma as the only one beyond the Seven Rishis. It also describes him as the god with multi-dimensional vision and supreme strength, who can easily predict in which direction his creation will move.

### Physical characteristics

Virat Vishwakarma as appears with five tilakamarked faces sadyojaatha, vaamaka, aghora, tathpurusha, and eesaana. Interestingly, Shiva's five faces also have the same names, so it is possible he was also considered equal to that deity as well.

He appears with ten arms holding a book and stylus, sword, adze, citron, cup, water-pot, rosary, cobra and noose. Vishwakarma's hands represent sternness and beneficence (one closed and one open).

The Ramayana represents Vishwakarma as having built the island of Lanka and also as having created the ape Nala, who built Rama's bridge from the continent to the island.

Loha Shilpis (Blacksmiths), Kamsya Shilpis (Bronzesmiths), Daru Shilpis (Carpenters), Rathi Shilpis (Architects/Masons/Sculptors) and Swarna Shilpis (Goldsmiths) are all considered to be the descendants of this deity.

### Worship of Vishwakarma

Vishwakarma is commemorated on Rishi Panchami. The above-mentioned five groups

among of the Vishwakarma community celebrate this as an auspicious day, spending it in prayer of Vishwakarma.

The Vishwakarma Jayanthi, which is widely celebrated by industrial houses, artisans and craftsmen, is observed on the Kanya Sankranti Day, which falls on September 17 every year. It is believed that on this day, the forefathers of the Vishwakarma people invented the plough and gave it to humanity. The plough represents agriculture and therefore becomes the most vital symbol of the ancient Indian civilization. This also happens to be the birthday of Vishwakarma.

## Vishwakarma's architectural wonders

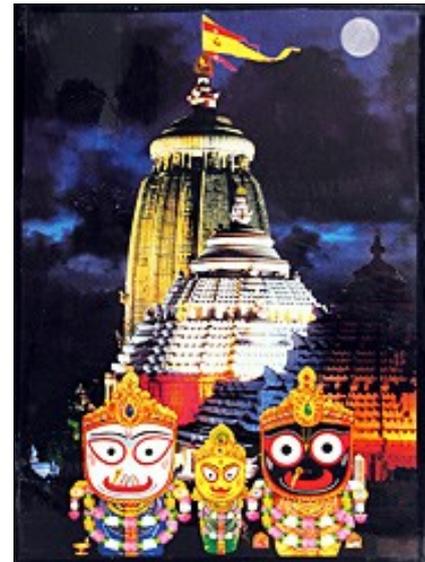
Vishwakarma has created many architectural wonders. He had built several towns and palaces for the gods through all the four yugas. The Jagannath Temple, a sacred Hindu temple in Puri, is famous for its huge sculptures of Krishna, Subhadra and Balarama, of which Vishwakarma is considered the sculptor.

Dwarka, the capital of Lord Krishna, is also one among the many towns Viswakarma built. That is why this place has become a well known pilgrimage for the Hindus today. In the Kali Yuga, Viswakarma has built the town of Hastinapura, the capital of Kauravas and Pandavas, the warring families of the Mahabharata. After winning the battle of Kurukshetra, Lord Krishna installed Dharmaraj Yudhisthir as the ruler of Hastinapura.

Viswakarma also built the town of Indraprastha for the Pandavas. The other mystical creator, according to Hindu mythology, is Maya. The Mahabharata has it that King Dhritrashtra offered a piece of land called 'Khaandavprastha' to the Pandavas for living. Yudhishtir obeyed his uncle's order and went to live in

Khaandavprastha with the Pandava brothers. Later, Lord Krishna invited Viswakarma to build a capital for the Pandavas right on this plot of land, which he called 'Indraprastha'.

The floors of this palace were so well done that they had a reflection like that of water, and the pools and ponds inside the palace gave the illusion of a flat surface with no water in them. After the palace was built, the Pandavas invited the Kauravas, and Duryodhana and his brothers went to visit Indraprastha. The unsuspecting Duryodhan thought he was walking on the floor and fell into one of the ponds. Draupadi, who witnessed this scene, had a good laugh. This insult annoyed Duryodhan so much that later on it became a major cause for the great Mahabharata war at Kurukshetra, as described in the Bhagavad Gita.



[Buy this Picture](#)

**JAGANNATH TEMPLE IN PURI**

---

## Vayu - the God of Wind

Vayu is a Hindu deity, presiding over the element of air. Vayu is hence the Lord of the winds. Vayu, the father of Bhima and the spiritual father of Lord Hanuman, is also known as Pavana, Vaata and Praana. Vayu is one of the Panchamahabhutas or five elements. 'Vaata' literally means both "atmosphere" and "blown", "Vaayu" means "blower", and "Praana", "breath". Hence, this deity is also regarded as the "Deity of Life", who is sometimes also referred to as "Mukhya-Vaayu" or "Mukhya Praana".

Interestingly, there is however a separate set of five deities of Praana (vital breath) and Mukhya-Praana is their chief. These five Vaayu deities, Praana, Apaana, Vyaana, Udaana, and Samaana, control life, the wind, touch/sensation, digestion, and excretion respectively.



[Buy this Statue](#)

**HANUMAN  
SON OF VAYU**

Pavan had played a vital role in Anjana begetting Hanuman as her child. Hence Hanuman is also called Pavan-Putra (son of Pavana) and Vaayu-Putra. In the Mahabharata, Bheema, another son of Vaayu, played a great role in the war of Kurukshetra. He utilised his formidable physical power and skill in the Gada Yudhha (fighting with the mace) martial art to fight against the Pandavas.

## Physical characteristics

Vayu is described as an exceptionally beautiful deity, moving noisily in his ratha (carriage), driven by forty-nine or thousand white and purple horses. His main attribute is a white banner. Like the other atmospheric deities, he is a warrior deity, powerful, heroic and destroyer of adharma.

## Legends on Vayu

The Upanishads gives many illustrations on the greatness of Vayu. The Brihadaranyaka states that the gods who control bodily functions once engaged in a contest to determine who among them is the greatest. It was seen here that when a deity such as that of vision left a man's body, that man would still continue to live, albeit as a blind man. He would regain the lost faculty once the errant deity returned to his post. One by one, the deities all took their turns leaving the body, but the man still continued to live on, though impaired each time one of the deities left his body.

Finally, when Mukhya Prana started to leave the body, all the other deities were forced out of the body as well. This caused the other deities to realize that they could survive and function only when empowered by Vayu, and that Vayu could easily overshadow them.

Followers of the Dvaita philosophy believe that Mukhya-Vayu incarnated as Madhvacharya, in order to fulfill his mission of teaching people to worship the Supreme Lord Vishnu and to correct the errors of the Advaita philosophy as well. In fact, Madhvacharya himself makes this claim, citing the Rig Veda as his evidence.

---

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

Our efforts have been directed at making this article informative and refreshing for you. We will truly appreciate all forms of feedback. Please send your feedback to [info@dollsofindia.com](mailto:info@dollsofindia.com).