

# Saptharishi Mandala: The Stellar Saga

Step into the celestial realm where myth and astronomy intertwine, as we embark on a stellar journey to rediscover the Big Dipper through the lens of Indian mythology. Far beyond the familiar Greek and Roman tales, lies a rich tapestry of stories woven into the very fabric of Indian culture, offering a unique perspective on this famed constellation. These narratives, steeped in tradition and wisdom, not only captivate the imagination but also ignite a passion for the stars among novices and aficionados alike. Join us as we delve into the cosmic lore of the Saptharishi Mandala, where each star tells a tale of enlightenment and devotion, guiding us through the night sky and into the heart of India's astronomical heritage. Prepare to be enthralled by the ancient sages' celestial saga, as we explore the Big Dipper like never before.



## Introduction



The Big Dipper, an iconic asterism observed in the night sky, is composed of seven prominent stars: Dubhe, Merak, Phecda, Megrez, Alioth, Mizar, and Alkaid. These celestial beacons form part of the larger constellation known as Ursa Major, or The Great Bear, a name that has resonated through the ages. Notably, the Big Dipper serves as a steadfast guide for navigators and stargazers alike, as it perpetually points northward, making it a reliable marker in the celestial sphere. This asterism's significance extends beyond its striking luminosity and into the realms of history and mythology, where it has been a constant source of inspiration and wonder.

## About Saptharishi Mandala

In the tapestry of the night sky, the Saptharishi Mandala casts a spellbinding silhouette, known to many as the Big Dipper. This celestial formation is deeply rooted in Indian mythology, where it is revered as the embodiment of the seven great sages—Kratu, Pulaha, Pulastya, Atri, Angiras, Vasishtha, and Marichi. These luminous stars are not mere points of light; they are the storied Saptharishis, the seven sages who have been etched into the Hindu culture. The number 'seven' holds a tale as old as time, intertwined with the mysteries of Sanatan Dharm and the sacred tradition of identifying the Arundhati Nakshatra during matrimonial ceremonies. As the Saptharishi Mandala steadfastly occupies the northern sky, it serves as a celestial compass, symbolizing the eternal guidance provided by the sages to all life on Earth. Their astral presence is a constant reminder that wisdom and guidance are ever-present, watching over us from the above.



## Naming and the Timeline

In the rich tapestry of Hindu mythology, the Saptharishis hold a place of honour, their names echoing through time and story. A search through the internet might reveal names like Kashyapa, Vishwamitra, Vasishta, Gautama, Bharadwaja, Atri, and Jamadagni—each a sage with a tale to tell. Vishwamitra is famed for his fiery temper, a contrast to the sage Gautama, who is central to the poignant narrative of Ahalya and Lord Rama. Then there's Bharadwaja, the compassionate sage who provided refuge to Lord Rama during his years of exile. But the names of the Seven Sages which I mentioned earlier is different. Why is this? The main reason is due to the timeline of their naming.

According to Hindu beliefs, at the universe's inception, Lord Brahma created the Saptharishis from his mind. These sages, known as Brahma Rishis, achieved the pinnacle of enlightenment and possessed knowledge so vast that no earthly weapon could harm them. During the first 308 million years, known as the Swayambhu Manvantara, sages Kratu, Pulaha, Pulastya, Atri, Angiras, Vasishta, and Marichi led all species on Earth. The image in the right is the idols of the Seven sages present in the Big Dipper Constellation.



As one Manvantara gives way to the next, new sages emerge, and the stars of the Big Dipper bear the names of the original sages from the first Manvantara, a tradition that continues to this day. We currently reside in the Vasishta Manvantara, with sages Kashyapa, Vishwamitra, Vasishta, Gautama, Bharadwaja, Atri, and Jamadagni guiding us through this cosmic epoch. Their stories and wisdom, immortalized in the stars, continue to guide and inspire humanity.

## Story of Vasishta, Arundati and Krittika

Gazing upon the Big Dipper, one beholds the celestial dance of Vasishta and Arundati, commonly



known as Mizar and Alcor. Mizar, a blue main sequence star, reveals itself as a quadruple star system, while its companion, Alcor, forms a binary system, together weaving a sextuple tapestry in the cosmos. To the naked eye, they appear as a binary pair, a luminous testament to their mythological counterparts.

In the stories of Hindu mythology, these stars are entwined with the tale of the Krittika, the wives of the seven sages, and Agni, the god of fire, whose heart was ensnared by their beauty. Yet, it was Svaha, the goddess of sacrifices, who captured Agni's love by transforming into six of the Krittika, save for Arundati, whose unwavering devotion to Vasishta was beyond imitation. From their union, the warrior god Karthikeya was born, revered by many as the son of the Krittika.

The sages, upon hearing this, renounced all but Vasishta, who stood steadfast by Arundati, his faith unshaken. The others, now separated from their celestial consorts, formed the Pleiades Star Cluster, where only six stars shine brightly, the seventh obscured, symbolizing the absent Arundati. The Image in the right is the picture of Pleiades Star Cluster.





In Hindu weddings, the purohits guide the couple to behold Vasishta and Arundati in the sky, a celestial lesson in trust and devotion. Scientifically speaking some stars stand alone, and others are hidden within binary systems, the pairing of Vasishta and Arundati remains clear to our eyes, a cosmic reflection of their eternal bond and guide them to have same trust and love as what Vasishta and Arundati had on each other.

## Conclusion

The cosmos, with its constellations, star clusters, and planets, has long been a source of wonder, inspiring countless mythological narratives. These stories, crafted by ancient philosophers with the most rudimentary of tools, demonstrate a profound understanding of complex astronomical concepts, such as the Binary Star System. They ingeniously encoded this knowledge into tales that have been passed down through generations, serving as a bridge between the past and the present. These mythological tales are not just relics of a bygone era; they are living testaments to the human quest for understanding, playing a pivotal role in the scientific exploration of today. Embracing these cultural narratives from our ancestors provides us with a richer comprehension of our current world and empowers us to forge a future where the wisdom of the past informs the breakthroughs of tomorrow. Engaging with these stories is more than a journey through time—it's an ongoing dialogue with the universe itself.



By, Vishnuthirtha SH  
Stargazing Expert (Astroport India)