

# Vishvamisra

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Vishvamisra with Rama and Lakshmana, as Rama redeems [Ahalya](#).

**Brahmarshi Vishvamisra** ([Sanskrit](#): विश्वामित्र viśvā-mitra "friend of the world"; [Kannada](#): ವಿಶ್ವಾಮಿತ್ರ; [Malayalam](#): വിശ്വമിത്ര; [Telugu](#): విశ్వామిత్ర; [Tamil](#): விஸ்வாமித்திரர் Visvāmittiraṇ; [Thai](#): Swamit; [Burmese](#): Bodaw; [Javanese](#): Wiswamisra) is one of the most venerated [rishis](#) or sages of ancient times in [India](#). He is also credited as the author of most of [Mandala 3](#) of the [Rigveda](#), including the [Gayatri Mantra](#). The [Puranas](#) mention that only 24 rishis since antiquity have understood the whole meaning of, and thus wielded the whole power of, the Gayatri Mantra. Vishvamisra is supposed to be the first and [Yajnavalkya](#) the last.



Kaushika

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Birth of Shakuntala - Vishvamisra rejects the child, Painting by [Raja Ravi Varma](#).

The story of Vishvamisra is narrated in the Balakanda of Valmiki Ramayana.<sup>[1]</sup> The Mahabharata adds that Vishvamisra's relationship with Menaka resulted in a daughter, [Shakuntala](#) whose story is narrated in the Adi Parva of the Mahabharata.

Vishvamisra was a king in ancient India, also called Kaushika "descendant of Kusha". He was a valiant warrior and the great-grandson of a great king named Kusha. The Valmiki Ramayana, prose 51 of Bala Kanda, starts with the story of Vishvamisra:

There was a king named Kusha (not to be confused with [Kusha](#), son of [Rama](#)), a brainchild of [Brahma](#), and Kusha's son was the powerful and verily righteous Kushanabha. One who is highly renowned by the name [Gaadhi](#) was the son of Kushanabha, and Gaadhi's son is this great-saint of great resplendence, Vishvamisra. Vishvamisra ruled the earth, and this great-resplendent king ruled the kingdom for many thousands of years.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

His story also appears in various Puranas, however they show variations from the Ramayana. The Vishnu Purana and Harivamsha chapter 27 (dynasty of Amavasu) of Mahabharata narrates the birth of Vishvamisra. According to [Vishnu Purana](#),<sup>[2]</sup> Kushika married a damsel belonging to Purukutsa dynasty (later called as Shatamarshana lineage - descendants of the [Ikshvaku](#) king Trasadasyu) and had a son by name Gaadhi who had a daughter named Satyawati (not to be confused with the [Satyawati](#) of [Mahabharata](#)).

Satyawati was married to an old Brahmin known as Ruchika who was foremost among the race of [Bhrigu](#). Ruchika desired a son having the qualities of a Brahmin, and so he gave Satyawati a sacrificial offering ([charu](#)) which he had prepared to achieve this objective. He also gave Satyawati's

mother another charu to make her conceive a son with the character of a [Kshatriya](#) at her request. But Satyavati's mother privately asked Satyavati to exchange her charu with her. This resulted in Satyavati's mother giving birth to Vishvamisra, the son of a Kshatriya [Gadhi](#) with the qualities of a Brahmin; and Satyavati gave birth to [Jamadagni](#), the father of [Parashurama](#), a Brahmin with qualities of a Kshatriya.

## Conflict with Vasistha

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On one of his exploits, he and his soldiers took rest in the [ashram](#) of [Rishi Vasistha](#). There, his whole army was well fed and taken care of. This caused a doubt in the king's mind as to how it was possible for this simple ashram to take care of all the arrangements to feed an entire army. He expressed his surprise to the sage. Vasistha replied,

*"O king, this feast that you have partaken with your kinsmen, has been provided by my calf [Nandini](#) (sometimes referred as Sabala), who was gifted to me by [Indra](#). You must know that she is the daughter of Indra's cow [Kamadhenu](#). She provides me with everything I need."*

Kaushika was filled with wonder when he heard this. He began to think that possessing this cow would mean a lot to him; after all, the sage did not have to provide food and sustenance for a large army everyday. He expressed a desire to the sage for obtaining Nandini from him. Vasistha was polite, but steadfast in his refusal. He would not be tempted by the offer of untold wealth that was made by Kaushika, for after all who can set a price on a cow, which can readily yield all the riches in the world.

The king grew exceedingly angry. He insulted the [Brahmarishi](#) with harsh words, and ordered his soldiers to seize the cow, and drive it to his kingdom. Nandini was the daughter of Kamadhenu and hence she forcefully protested against the soldiers. Using her powers, she saved the life of Vasistha.

### [\[edit\]](#) Alternative Version

Vasistha destroys Kaushika's entire army by the simple use of his great mystic and spiritual powers, breathing the [Aum](#) syllable. Vasistha also thus kills one hundred of Kaushika's sons, while restoring his hermitage's beauty and life.

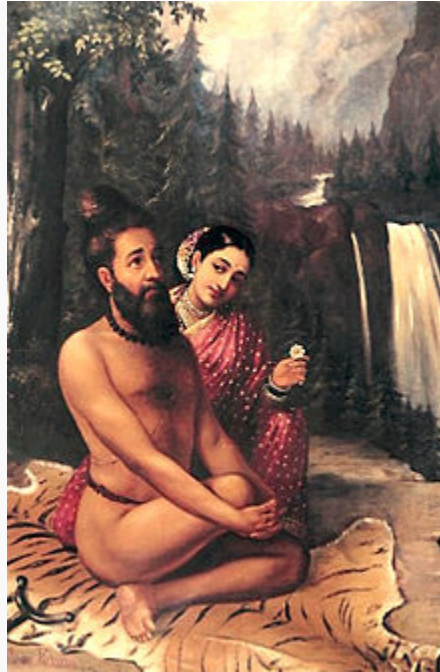
Kaushika then undertakes a [tapasya](#) for several years to please [Shiva](#), who bestows upon him the knowledge of celestial weaponry. He proudly goes to Vasistha's ashram again, and uses all kinds of powerful weapons to destroy Vasistha and his hermitage. He succeeds in the latter but not in the former.

An enraged Vasistha brings out his *brahmadaṇḍa*, a wooden stick imbued with the power of [Brahma](#). It consumes Kaushika's most powerful weapons, including the [brahmastra](#). Vasistha then attempts to

attack Kaushika, but his anger is allayed by the [Devas](#). Kaushika is left humiliated while Vasistha restores his hermitage.

## Tapasya

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Vishvamitra and Menaka, painting by Raja Ravi Varma.

This incident made a deep impression on the King. He realized that the power obtained by penances was far greater than mere physical might. He renounced his kingdom and began his quest to become a greater rishi than Vasistha. He took on the name *Vishvamitra*. It is very interesting to see all the challenges that Viswamitra faced in his life to become a Brahmarishi, before eventually giving up the greed to possess the cow. After many trials and undergoing many austerities, Vishvamitra at last obtained the title of [Brahmarishi](#) from Vasistha himself. During this time he had a daughter named [Shakuntala](#) (who appears in the [Mahabharata](#)) with [Menaka](#), an [apsara](#) in the court of Indra. Son of Shakuntala became a great emperor. He came to be known as [Emperor Bharata](#), in whose name the land of India got its name **Bharatha**.

### Alternative version

Kaushika seeks to attain the same spiritual power as Vasistha, to become his equal, a [brahmarishi](#). He undertakes a fierce penance for one thousand years, after which [Brahma](#) names him a *Rajarishi*, or royal sage.

After another long penance of thousand years, Brahma names him a [rishi](#), thus leaving his royal lineage permanently. And Brahma suggest him to take Bramharshi grade from his guru Vashishta only, as he only has the power to call you as Brahmarshi.

At this point, [Indra](#), the king of [Swarga](#) attempts to test the tapasvin by sending [Menaka](#), an [apsara](#) to seduce him. Kaushik then lives with Menaka for 10 years. They have a baby girl [Shakuntala](#). Kaushik becomes angry as Menaka had destroyed his years of meditation and thus he cursed her that she won't possess her beauty, of which she was proud, in next birth.

Kaushika now goes to the banks of the river *Kaushiki*, which is the spirit of his own sister. After many thousands of years of penance, [Brahma](#) names him [maharishi](#), but also tells him that he hasn't become a *jitendriya* yet, lacking control over his passions. This is brought to light to Kaushika when he angrily curses [Rambha](#), an apsara sent by Indra to seduce Kaushika again, to become a stone for a thousand years.



Visvamitra is addressed as maharsis by Brahma and other gods alarmed by his austerities

## Rise to Brahmarishi

After cursing Rambha, Kaushika goes to the highest mountain of the [Himalayas](#) to perform an even more severe tapasya for over a thousand years. He ceases to eat, and reduces his breathing to a bare minimum.

He is tested again by Indra, who comes as a poor [Brahmin](#) begging for food just as Kaushika is ready to break a fast of many years by eating some rice. Kaushika instantly gives his food away to Indra and resumes his meditation. Kaushika also finally masters his passions, refusing to be provoked by any of Indra's testing and seductive interferences.

At the penultimate culmination of a multi-thousand year journey, Kaushika's yogic power is at a peak. At this point, Brahma, at the head of the [Devas](#) led by Indra, names Kaushika a [brahmarishi](#), and names him *Vishvamitra*, or *Friend of All* for his unlimited compassion. He is also embraced by [Vasistha](#), and their enmity is instantly ended.

## Vishvamitra's Characteristics

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As a former king, and one over as vast a realm as he had been, Vishvamitra was known to retain a regal and often haughty bearing. He was known for his high temper and often cursed people in his anger, thereby depleting his yogic powers obtained by much penance. People feared his temper and prayed that their actions might not get misconstrued by the touchy sage.

However, as a former king, Vishvamitra also possessed great compassion for all beings. Having taken pity on [Trishanku](#), he willingly exhausted all the punya he gained from his tapas, to enable him to ascend to the heavens. Following his attainment of the status of brahmarishi, he was known to use the power of his tapas to help anyone who was in need, whatever the cost to himself.

Kaushika's love of Menaka is considered to have been intense and passionate.

## Gayatri Mantra

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Sage Vishvamitra was the one who found revered great Mantra - The Gayatri Mantra. It is a mantra found in the Rig, Yajur, and Sama Vedas. Gayathri is actually a "Chandas" or meter.

## Legends

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Indra prevents Trisanku from ascending to Heaven in physical form-from The Freer Ramayana

Another story Vishvamitra is known for is his creation of his own version of *Svarga* or heaven, called *Trisanku Svarga*. When a proud King Trisanku asked his [guru](#), [Vasistha](#), to send him to heaven in his own body, the guru responded that the body cannot ascend to heaven.

King Trisanku then asked Vasistha's hundred sons to send him to heaven. The sons, outraged that Trisanku should not come to them when their father had refused, cursed him to be a Chandala, or untouchable. Trisanku was transformed into a person with body smeared of ash, clothed in black and wearing Iron jewellery. Since none of his subjects could recognize him, he was driven out of the kingdom.

He came across the sage Vishvamitra, who agreed to help him. Visvamitra organized a great sacrifice and ritual propitiating the [Devas](#), pleading that they accept Trisanku in heaven. Not one Deva responded. Angered, Viswamitra used his yogic powers and ordered Trisanku to rise to heaven. Miraculously, Trisanku rose into the sky until he reached heaven, where he was pushed back down by [Indra](#).

Enraged even more by this, the powerful Visvamitra then commenced the creation of another Universe (including another Brahma) for Trisanku. He had only completed the Universe when [Brihaspati](#) ordered

him to stop. Trisanku, however, did not enjoy Trisanku Svarga, he remained fixed in the sky and was transformed into a [constellation](#).

In the process of forming a new universe, Vishvamisra used up all the tapas he had gained from his austerities. Therefore after the Trisanku episode, Vishvamisra had to start his prayers again to attain the status of a Brahma Rishi, to equal Vashistha.

## Ambarisha's Sacrifice



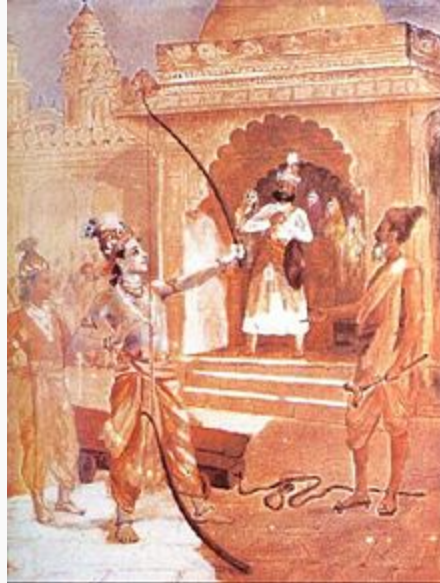
Ambarisha offers the youth Sunahsepha in sacrifice

While undertaking a penance, Kaushika helps a boy named Shunahsepha who has been sold by his parents to be sacrificed at [Ambarisha's yagna](#) to please [Varuna](#), the God of the Oceans. The king's son [Rohit](#) does not want to be the one sacrificed, as was originally promised to Varuna, so young Sunahsepha is being taken. A devastated and terrified Sunahsepha falls at the feet of Kaushika, who is deep in meditation, and begs for his help.<sup>[3]</sup>

Kaushika teaches secret mantras to Sunahsepha. The boy sings these mantras at the ceremony, and is blessed by [Indra](#) and [Varuna](#), and Harishchandra's ceremony is also completed.

## In the *Ramayana*





Vishvamitra looks as Rama breaks the bow, winning the hand of Sita in marriage. Painting by [Raja Ravi Varma](#).

In the [Indian epic \*Ramayana\*](#), Vishvamitra is the preceptor of [Rama](#), prince of [Ayodhya](#) and the seventh [Avatar](#) of [Vishnu](#), and his brother [Lakshmana](#).

Vishvamitra gives them the knowledge of the *Devastras* or celestial weaponry [bala and adi bala], trains them in advanced religion and guides them to kill powerful demons like [Tataka](#), [Maricha](#) and [Subahu](#). He also leads them to the [svayamvara](#) ceremony for princess [Sita](#), who becomes the wife of Rama.

## Vishvamitra In Buddhism

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In the Buddhist [Vinaya Pitaka](#) of the *Mahavagga* (I.245)<sup>[4]</sup> section the Buddha pays respect to Vishvamitra by declaring that the Veda in its true form was declared to the Vedic rishis "Atthako, Vâmako, Vâmadevo, **Vessâmitto**, [Yamataggi](#), [Angiras](#), [Bhâradvâjo](#), [Vâsettho](#), [Kassapo](#), and [Bhagu](#)"<sup>[5]</sup> and because that true Veda was altered by some priests he refused to pay homage to the altered version.<sup>[6]</sup>