

Yayati



Yayathi rescuing a woman

Yayati ([Sanskrit](#): ययाति) was a [Puranic](#) king and the son of king [Nahusha](#) and one of ancestors of [Pandavas](#). He had five brothers, [Yati](#), [Samyati](#), [Ayati](#), [Viyati](#) and [Kriti](#). He had two wives, [Devayani](#) and [Sharmishtha](#). Devayani was the daughter of [Shukracharya](#), the priest of [Asuras](#) (the [demons](#)). Sharmishtha was the daughter of the Demon King [Vrishparva](#). Sharmishtha was a friend and servant of Devayani. After hearing of his relationship with second wife Sharmishtha from Devayani her father, sage [Shukracharya](#), cursed Yayati to old age in the prime of life, but later allowed him to exchange it with his son, [Puru](#). His story finds mention in the [Mahabharata-Adi Parva](#) and also [Bhagavata Purana](#).^[1]

The story

The story of Yayati comes in the Book Nine, 19th Chapter of [Bhagavata Purana](#).^[2]

[Devayani](#) was the daughter of Sage [Shukracharya](#), the guru of all [Asuras](#), she had been cursed by sage [Kacha](#) that she would not marry another Brahmana. Sage Shukra was living in his palace. At that time the Asura king was Vrushaparva, whose daughter Sharmishta was close friend of Devayani.

One day, as Devayani and Sharmishtha along with the hoard of servants were amusing themselves in a park, King Yayati happened to pass by. Devayani had been secretly in love with Yayati, as he had once rescued her from a dry well. Devayani and Sharmishtha introduced themselves to him, and Devayani confessed to being in love with him and asked him to marry her.

Yayati said, "Unless your father gives you to me in marriage I will not accept you as my wife." Shukracharya gave in to his daughter's request, and agreed to give her away in marriage to King Yayati. As dowry, he gave away Sharmishtha. He however warned Yayati that he should never let Sharmishtha share his bed.^[citation needed]

Sharmishtha was given a place to live in a shaded glade called *Ashok Vatika*. One day Yayati happened to pass by Ashok Vatika where Sharmishtha lived. Seeing him, Sharmishtha confessed that she too was in love with the king, and wanted him to marry her. She told him that she belonged to a royal family, and Yayati could marry her. Yayati agreed and they wed in secret. They continued to meet and hid the fact from Devayani that they were married. Yayati had two sons from Devayani, [Yadu](#) and [Turvasu](#). Yayati also had three sons from Sharmishtha, [Druhyu](#), [Anu](#) and [Puru](#).

When Devayani came to know about the relationship of Yayati and Sharmishtha and their three sons, she felt shocked and betrayed. Devayani went away to her father Shukracharya, who displeased with the king, cursed that he would lose his youth, and become an old man immediately.^[2]

As soon as Shukracharya uttered his curse, Yayati became an old man. Shukracharya also said that his curse once uttered, could not be taken back, and added that the only concession he could give was that if Yayati wanted, he could give his old age to someone, and take his youth from him. Yayati was relieved at the reprieve he was given, and was confident that his sons would willingly exchange their youth with him. Yayati requested all his five sons one by one to give their youth to him to enjoy the worldly happiness. All the sons, except Puru rejected his demand. So Yayati took the youth of Puru. Later on, [Puru](#) became the successor of King Yayati.

According to the story, Yayati enjoyed the sensual pleasures for a "thousand years" and later realized the futility and said, "Know this for certain, ... not all the food, wealth and women of the world can appease the lust of a single man of uncontrolled senses. Craving for sense-pleasures is not removed but aggravated by indulgence even as ghee poured into fire increases it....One who aspires for peace and happiness should instantly renounce craving and seek that which neither grows old, nor ceases even when the body ages."^[2] Yayati then gave back the youth to Puru, receiving his old age in return. He renounced the world, and retired into a forest and according to the story, attained the lord through his spiritual practices.^[2]

§Sons of Devayani

- [Yadu](#) gave rise to *Yadu vansha*, and one of his descendants as [Krishna](#).
- Turvasu also known as Yavana and his descendant formed the [Yavana Kingdom](#)

§Sons of Sharmishtha

- [Druhyu](#) and his descendant are believed to have formed the [Twipra Kingdom](#).^[3]
- [Anu](#) gave rise to a [Mleccha](#) tribe, [Tusharas](#) (Tukharas, [Tocharians](#)), with their kingdom located in the north west of India as per the epic [Mahabharata](#). (Mbh 1:85) Further on [Kekaya](#), a warrior on the [Pandava](#) side into whose chariot [Bhima](#) got during the fighting on the sixth day. As per [Bhagavata Purana](#) the [Usinaras](#), the Sibi, the [Madras](#), and the [Kekayas](#) were the direct descendants of Anu. Sibi or Sivi is stated to be son of Usinara.^[4]
- [Puru](#), the youngest son succeeded the Yayati and inherited his kingdom in the [Gangatic plain](#). He in turn gave rise to *Puru Vansha* and eventually [Pauravas](#), whose [King Porus](#) fought with [Alexander the Great](#) in the [Battle of the Hydaspes River](#) in 326 BC.

Another one of his descendants was King [Bharat](#), son of King son of King [Dushyanta](#) and [Shakuntala](#), and after whom, India's ancient name [Bharatvarsha](#) was kept. Further descendants were part of the [Kuru Kingdom](#) including [Shantanu](#), [Dhritarashtra](#), Pandu, [Arjuna](#), [Abhimanyu](#) and [Parikshit](#).